

**JOHN
THOMSON**

— OF —

DUDDINGSTON

By

WM. BAIRD,
F.S.A. Scot.



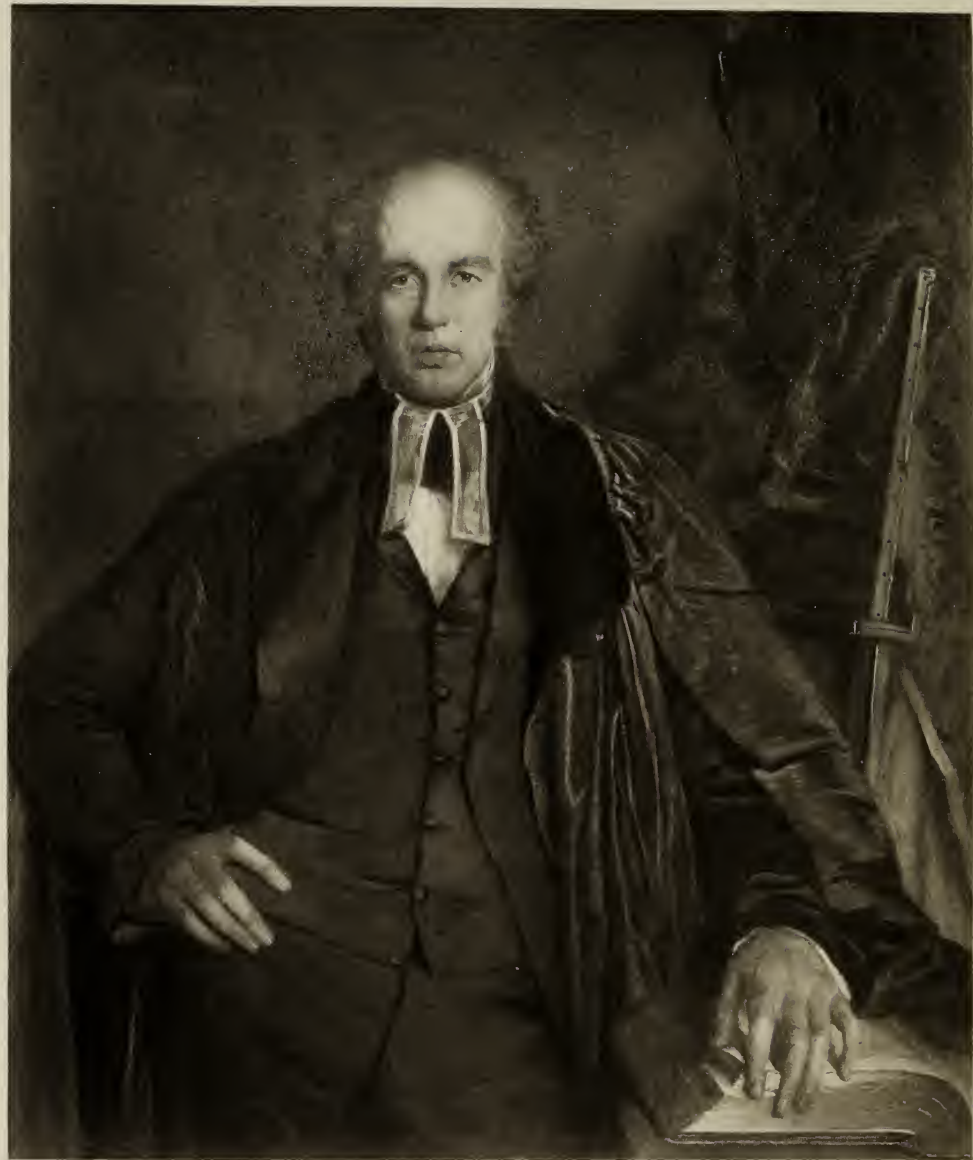
JAS. H. ANDERSON.

JOHN THOMSON OF DUDDINGSTON



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John Thomson

From the Portrait by Robert. Witt. Lauder R.S.A. the property of the Royal Scottish Academy

JOHN THOMSON

OF DUDDINGSTON

PASTOR AND PAINTER

A Memoir

WITH A CRITICAL REVIEW OF HIS WORKS: BY

WILLIAM BAIRD

F.S.A. SCOT.

AUTHOR OF 'THE LIFE OF GENERAL WAUCHOPE'
'ANNALS OF DUDDINGSTON AND PORTOBELLO,' ETC. ETC.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

NEARLY twelve years have elapsed since this Memoir of the Rev. John Thomson of Duddingston was first published. Received as it then was with flattering appreciation by press and public alike, it was speedily taken up, and for several years the book has been out of print.

It has frequently of late been suggested to the author that in view of the greatly increased interest now shown in Art and artists, the time had come when a new and popular edition of the life and work of one of the most celebrated of Scottish landscapists might be received with as much favour as the first. Yielding to these representations, this edition now offered to the public has undergone a careful revision, while additional matter not formerly available has been incorporated with the text. In this connection mention may particularly be made of extracts from the private correspondence of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder—author of *Tales of the Scottish Highlands*, *The Great Floods of 1829 in Morayshire*, *The Wolf of Badenoch*, etc. etc.—giving details of a sketching holiday tour with Thomson in the north of Scotland in the summer of 1831, which had been kindly placed at the author's disposal, before her death, by his daughter, the late Miss C. Dick Lauder.

The original illustrations are, with one or two unimportant exceptions, here reproduced, and nothing has been lacking in the effort to portray an attractive personality, sufficient, it is hoped, to enable the reader to apprehend with some distinctness the versatility and power of Thomson's genius, the place he occupied as a pioneer in the Scottish School of Landscape Art, and his share in the founding of the Royal Scottish Academy.

W. B.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

No adequate attempt has hitherto been made to give to the public a life of this notable Scottish artist, or to bring together under review the character of the work which has made him famous. This may possibly have arisen from the fact that so many of his contemporaries and most intimate friends—Sir Walter Scott, Lord Jeffrey, Lord Cockburn, Professor Wilson, and others—bulk so largely in the literary annals of the first half of the century as to have in some measure eclipsed the fame of the artist minister of Duddingston.

The rise of the Scottish School of Landscape Art is both an instructive and interesting story, and with the events of that story the life of the Rev. John Thomson is so closely bound up that we feel justified in claiming for him more recognition than he has as yet received.

Scotland at the beginning of the century was certainly not distinguished for artistic culture, and landscape art especially was far below mediocrity. With the finest scenery in the world, there was no one to interpret its form and features, its hidden mysteries of colour and shade.

There were undoubtedly a few painters of portraits, some of them distinguished enough in their own walk : but the painters of portraits were too busy to have time to look at trees and rivers and lakes and rocks and mountains. Patrons of Art were content to give commissions for pictures of themselves and their wives to hand down as family heirlooms to their children, but never dreamt of asking for a picture of a place. It is possible there may have been love of locality

all the same, and a certain pleasure was doubtless taken in the beauties of the field, the garden, the park with its trees, or even in the more rugged wildness of moor and mountain; but what we call the love of Nature—looking at Nature through a sympathetic perception of its innate beauty and soul-satisfying power—was practically—at least so far as one can judge from outward manifestations—non-existent.

True Art is the discovery of Nature. Like a coy maiden, she must be courted to be won. The deep searching perception of the critic is not sufficient for this. He may talk learnedly of what he thinks defective in an artist's work, but ask him to give his impressions of scenery in the concrete, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he will honestly tell you he cannot; that he has neither the faculty of seeing in Nature what is artistic, nor of interpreting her moods and humours for others. 'I don't see these colours of yours in the sunset,' said a lady once to Turner. 'I daresay not, madam,' said the artist, 'but don't you wish you could?' This true artistic faculty, the very essence of Art, which grasps as with unerring instinct the secrets of Nature not always on the surface, is doubtless in some cases inborn, but more frequently it is the result of years of patient study and observation. He who so evolves Nature's mysteries, that they appear as in a mirror, charming the sense and feeding the imagination, is an artist indeed. We are immersed in beauty—the very air is full of it—the vault of heaven above and the fields around all speak of light and colour and grace of form, but only the eyes of the few are open to the clear vision which can detach objects from one another, and so group them as to satisfy the sense of beauty which, if not common to all, it is possible to develop in even the most uncultured.

Tom Purdie, Scott's gamekeeper and *factotum*, was many years in his service, and being constantly in the company of his betters, had picked up insensibly some of the taste and feeling of a higher

order. 'When I came here first,' said Tom to the factor's wife, 'I was little better than a beast, and knew nae mair than a cow what was pretty and what was ugly. I was cuif enough to think that the bonniest thing in a countryside was a corn-field enclosed in four stane dykes; but now I ken the difference. Look this way, Mrs. Laidlaw, and I'll show you what the gentle folks likes. See ye there now the sun glintin' on Melrose Abbey? It's no' a' bright, nor it's no' a' shadows neither, but just a bit screed o' light, an' a bit daud o' dark yonder like, and that's what they ca' picturesque; and, indeed, it maun be confessed,' said honest Tom, 'it is unco bonnie to look at.' Thus it may happen that the individual in whom simple tastes, combined with susceptibility to the best and noblest of human influences, may prove himself, in spite of the accidents of birth and the want of early training, one of the best of Art critics. But Tom Purdie's experience only went the length of admiration. The power to discriminate between the useful and the beautiful, between the purely utilitarian and what is æsthetically educational and soul-stirring, and so to apply it either through the medium of the pen or the pencil, is reserved to the artist; and he only is a great artist who follows after the beautiful in Nature in a loving, reverential spirit, with earnestness of purpose and increasing ardour following where she leads, and pointing out her secrets so that others are forced to follow and to admire.

What Sir Walter Scott by his living voice did for Tom Purdie, he also did for his countrymen and the world by his pen; and what he did with the pen, with no less truth, it may be said, his friend John Thomson of Duddingston accomplished by means of his pencil and his brush. Both were artists. Their materials or mediums were different. The one was a word painter, the other gave himself

'To paint the finest features of the mind,
And to most subtle and mysterious things
Give colour, strength, and motion.'

If the poetry of the one was a painting that can speak, the painting of his friend was, we may say, a dumb poetry—speaking in silent whispers—the adaptation of poetry to the eye.

Thomson, like Scott and Burns, had the fine, far-seeing sense of the painter-poet. His Art was not imitation merely. He was too thoughtful for that. It partakes far more of the creative, and so reveals to us Nature's harmonies in skilful combination. Ralph Emerson, in his Essay on Art, has said: 'In landscape the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of Nature he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendour. He should know that the landscape has beauty for his eye, because it expresses a thought which is to him good; and this because the same power which sees through his eyes is seen in that spectacle; and he will come to value the expression of Nature and not Nature itself, and so exalt in his copy the features that please him. Thus, the Genius of the Hour sets his ineffaceable seal on his work, and gives it an inexpressible charm for the imagination.'

In the following pages we have endeavoured—imperfectly it may be—to trace the development of Thomson's art genius, and the influence of his mind and work over the thought and Art of his day and ours. We should have liked had we been able to give more details of his life; but after half a century such details are difficult to get. Few of his letters have survived the ravages of time. He has left us no journal or diary; and even his sermons have all but disappeared. This paucity of written material at our disposal has in some measure been counterbalanced by a careful gleaning of contemporary literature, the personal reminiscences and letters of relatives and old parishioners, and Church Records of Presbytery and Parish.

In the circumstances anything like a connected narrative of events in consecutive order was a task surrounded with peculiar difficulties. If, therefore, a want of cohesion should here and there occur to interrupt the current of the story, our readers will we hope

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sympathise with rather than blame us in our endeavour so far to make bricks without straw.

Where so many have been willing to help, it may seem invidious to make a selection; but even at the risk of possible omission of some whose kindness ought to be acknowledged, we must specially express to the following noblemen and gentlemen our sense of our obligations and sincere thanks:—His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, the Right Hon. the Earl of Rosebery, the Right Hon. the Earl of Wemyss and March, the Right Hon. the Earl of Stair, the Right Hon. J. H. A. Macdonald (the Lord Justice-Clerk), the Right Hon. Lord Young, Sir Charles Dalrymple, Bart., M.P., H. T. N. Ogilvy, Esq. of Biel, R. S. Wardlaw Ramsay, Esq. of Whitehill, Lockhart Thomson, Esq., Derreen, Murrayfield. Examples taken from their collections will be found among our illustrations. They have been selected from canvases large and small rather as typical specimens, than from Thomson's finest or most notable pictures. As a rule, we have avoided reproducing pictures which have already been engraved or etched, and so may be known to the public, preferring to illustrate his work from pictures not generally known.

To the Secretaries of the National Galleries of London and Edinburgh, and of the Royal Scottish Academy, we are indebted for much valuable information; while we cannot sufficiently recognise the invariable courtesy and kind assistance extended to us by Mr. Hugh A. Webster of the University Library, Mr. Hew Morrison of the Public Library, the Officials of Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, and Dr. Thomas Dickson of the Register House. Our dear friend, the late Mr. J. M. Gray of the National Portrait Gallery, whose interest in the work was sincere, and whose aid was invaluable, is, alas, beyond our thanks. His untimely death has caused a blank in our Scottish Art literature which may not easily be filled.

Among others whose names must not be overlooked are the Rev. J. Hunter Paton of Duddingston and the Rev. George Turnbull

of Dailly, both of whom have willingly contributed such local information as was within their knowledge; while of the Rev. John Thomson's relatives now living, we gratefully tender our thanks to Lockhart Thomson, Esq. (a nephew), Mrs. Isabella Lauder Thomson (a grand-daughter), Mrs. Captain John Thomson (daughter-in-law), Mrs. Neale, Leicester (a grand-daughter), and Mr. H. H. Pillans of the Royal Bank, Hunter Square, Edinburgh.

Last of all, we would specially mention our obligations to the Hon. Hew H. Dalrymple, F.S.A. Scot., of Lochinch, whose assistance in bringing to our knowledge and procuring access to Thomson's works in the private collections of our nobility has been cordially given, and is now gratefully acknowledged.

PORTOBELLO, 1st December 1894.

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‘WHAT is the painter’s aim?—to satisfy
The cravings of coarse minds, that have no love
For Art, nor wit to lift themselves above
The baser mire, in which they grov’ling lie?
Or his the task to stoutly hold on high
A rallying flag for thoughtful men, who move
Weary and pained, ’mid the sad signs that prove
How gross the ills ’gainst which they testify?

What need for him of titles, honour, fame;
The newsman’s notice, or the people’s praise?
What need to strive for profit, or to raise
The vulgar adulation of his name?
For him, enough if Art’s true sons acclaim
His work, and hail the practice of his days.

CHAPTER I

Introduction—Birth and Parentage—Early Training—The Parish School—The Minister's Family—The Manse of Dailly—Early Aspirations for Art—First Efforts—Thomas Thomson and Lord Hailes.



It is now over half a century since the quiet little parish of Duddingston lost its Artist Minister, and Scotland one of her most distinguished sons. The fame of John Thomson is not, like that of Scott, Burns, or Allan Ramsay, on the surface. There are thousands of educated Scotsmen who, perhaps, have never heard his name mentioned—who may never have seen or heard of his works; and yet while he lived, and long years after his death, the man was, nay, he still is, an influence and power in the growth of Scottish art, more than is generally supposed.

His life, like that of most men of genius, was a dual one. By profession a minister of the gospel, he is better known to us now as a painter of landscapes, as Burns the ploughman, and Scott the clerk of session are better known as their country's song-writer and novelist.

In his day John Thomson was distinguished among his contemporaries; and if of late years, amid the crowd of literary, artistic, and scientific talent which has made the nineteenth century famous, his name has in some measure fallen out of sight, it is our purpose, if possible, to rectify this, and to place before our

readers some adequate estimate of the life and work of this great artist.

John Thomson's life cannot be said to have been an eventful one in the sense of exhibiting striking vicissitudes or romantic episodes; but neither can it be said to be a 'humdrum' life, devoid of interest. On the contrary, we shall find that it is a centre round which there gathers much that is of deepest interest in our national life, arising largely from his close intimacy and correspondence with the bright circle of literary and artistic society which, during the first half of last century, adorned the Scottish Capital. If, on the one hand, we find in him a man inclined to be retiring and modest, with no desire to shine as a star of the first, or indeed of any, magnitude, but only wishing to be allowed to pursue in peace the bent of his genius, we shall on the other hand find in him a man with a purpose, and with a quiet unobtrusiveness doing successfully what that genius prompted, leaving the world all the richer and better for his work.

Few human lives are without some interest, and if properly viewed, will fail to yield some lessons for guidance, or warning, or encouragement. In that of the Rev. John Thomson of Duddingston we hope to present the salient features of one who deserves well of his country, who by his artistic genius exercised no small influence over Scottish art in its infancy, and whose merit deserves more recognition than it has hitherto received.

It has been said that the history of Scottish art has yet to be written. In the following pages we do not impose upon ourselves any task so ambitious, but we shall be enabled, we think, to trace in some measure the beginnings of the National School of Art which within the past century has been so remarkably developed, which has

produced some notable painters, and which has been recognised all over the world for the remarkable force, vigour, and truthfulness to Nature which have characterised its work.

In John Thomson we will find a pioneer in the founding of Scottish landscape art. Love of Nature does not make an artist; but love of Nature must be in the heart of the painter who seeks to imitate Nature. Nature is the perfection of art, the ideal to which all true art aspires, and there can be no just imitation of Nature without art. It is the combination of the poetic sense with the manipulative power which constitutes the true artist, and enables him to represent to the senses of other men the secrets he has learned by patient waiting, for as Wordsworth truly says:—

‘Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; ’tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e’er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.’

Nature had been sadly neglected in this country, and the imitation of Nature in art had practically no existence at the beginning of last century. There were certainly plenty pictures scattered about in the mansions of our nobility, but these were mostly all the work of Continental artists. Portraits and figure pieces, battle-scenes and

sea-fights, formed the staple of these, landscape being treated for the most part as merely an accessory to some scene of human action or mythical legend.

Thomson developed for himself a consciousness of the beauty of Nature, in her many moods and aspects of sunshine and shade, of gloom and grandeur, which he combined with a happy infusion of objects of historical or human interest, and was able to stimulate the public fancy by his poetic rendering of these as it had never before been touched by his countrymen.

The story of his life—and it is a comparatively simple one—is overshadowed by his work; but his surroundings were not commonplace, neither were his associates ordinary men. Born in the manse of the secluded Ayrshire village of Dailly, on the 1st September 1778, John Thomson was pre-eminently a son of the manse; his father, his grandfather, and possibly his great-grandfather before him having been ministers of the Church of Scotland.¹

John Thomson never seems to have had the option of choosing his own career in life. That appears to have been settled for him without his being consulted in the matter. We are told he was destined from the cradle to follow his father's profession as a minister, and, notwithstanding his own often-expressed desire when a boy that he would like to be an artist, he dutifully allowed his father's predilection for the Church to influence his destiny so far that, while not giving up his love of art, he zealously—or perhaps as zealously as his tastes would permit—prosecuted his studies in divinity.

In the old Parish School of Dailly he received the first elements of his education under douce old Dominie Welsh; and if archi-

¹ See Appendix.

tecturally it was little better than a shed, with a thatched roof and the plainest of furniture, and had none of the appliances so much desiderated nowadays under School Board Acts and Privy Council regulations, yet it is to such schools most of Scotland's ablest and best sons in the past were indebted for their early education. Knowing no distinctions of rank, the sons of the laird, as well as the sons of the manse, found themselves competing on the same form with the ploughman's boys, or the labourer's boys from the clachan. In the pursuit of knowledge, all alike started from the same level. The teacher might be, and indeed was undoubtedly, badly paid for his efforts; but as a rule he was content, and frequently had the satisfaction of finding some one or other of his old pupils returning, after years of absence, perhaps, in a foreign land, where he had possibly acquired wealth and influence, to thank him for the sound instruction he had received at the Parish School. The old Parochial School system was, as Lord Macaulay has said, 'the foundation of Scotland's proudest distinction, and proved the great source of her prosperity; and it is owing, not indeed solely, but principally to it, that in spite of the barrenness of her soil and the severity of her climate, her people have made such progress in agriculture, in manufactures, in commerce, in letters, in science, in all that constitutes civilisation as the Old World has never seen equalled, and as even the New World has scarcely seen surpassed.'

The minister's four sons attended Mr. Welsh's school in turn, John the youngest in all likelihood going as a little boy of seven years, a year or two after his elder brother Thomas had been sent to college; and that the reverence and respect for their first teacher was carried through life is evidenced by some kind messages

communicating to him any step or success in after life, which they thought would give him satisfaction. Mr. Welsh had a salary of only £8, 6s. 8d.; and his whole emoluments, including perquisites as session-clerk, did not amount to £30 a year! On this scanty allowance he taught English, French, Latin, writing, arithmetic, and book-keeping; and he did one part of his duty so well that, as the *Statistical Account* states, 'there was scarcely an individual in the parish who had not been taught to read and write English.'

John Thomson's early years at the Parish School of Dailly came in time to be supplemented by attention to the Latin and Greek verbs in his father's study, under the special tuition of his elder brother Thomas, who was then in the latter years of his college curriculum. Thomas, who at the age of fourteen had been sent to Glasgow University, in 1782, distinguished himself from the first, especially in Greek, in which class he carried off four prizes. Having gained in 1785 one of the bursaries founded by the first Earl of Dundonald, he continued a 'gown' student for the unusual period of seven years, taking his degree of M.A. in 1789. During the two latter years of his course he was partly attending the Theological and Law Classes at Glasgow, and partly directing the education of his brothers at the manse. He was still in much uncertainty as to his future. The claims of the Church, counterbalanced by his predilection for law, made him hesitate before making up his mind, and so he read on at both subjects, hoping that some way would be opened up whereby the money difficulty of entering the latter profession would be overcome.

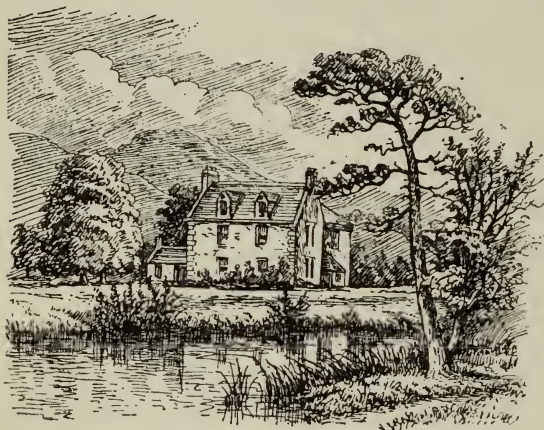
This was the height of Thomas's ambition. But the minister's

stipend was small, while his family was large; and the heavy fees required to pass as an advocate meant privation and self-denial for all. In the meantime, therefore, Thomas became the family tutor, and he so fixed himself in this respect that John used to say, half a century afterwards, that he had never quite shaken off the feeling of awe for his elder brother and master.

The value of the living of Dailly at that time, including manse and glebe, amounted at an average to £105 a year—not a very large sum, it must be said, on which to bring up a family comfortably. It is not known that the minister or his wife had any private fortune, yet for all that they lived socially with their neighbours, by all of whom they were much respected, exercised some hospitality, and gave their family the best education which the country afforded. The wonder is how it could be done; but the thing is so common in the manses of Scotland that it would be impertinent to praise the virtuous economy and the rigid self-denial required to accomplish such a feat.

The home influence of our Scottish manses has undoubtedly been a potent factor in the country's well-being. From them example as well as precept have not only radiated to sweeten the lives of many hard-wrought sons and daughters of toil, but from them has flowed a perpetual stream of youth to take their places in the world's work as leaders of thought, pioneers in science, ministers of religion, judges and lawyers, statesmen and merchant princes. As has been well said, 'the manse is perhaps the most potent and typical institution in rural Scotland.' The 'big house,' or whatever the place may be that corresponds to the English manor or hall, is much less important and characteristic. The clergy of Scotland have been for the past three hundred years

the real aristocracy, the true leaders and heroes of the people, interpreting and educating the national mind, possessing the popular imagination, filling the common heart. The lords and gentry, on the other hand—though it must be admitted there are many splendid exceptions—largely educated in England, and living there a great portion of the year, with their own social and political



THE MANSE, DAILLY

ambitions, have too frequently grown alien in mind and feeling towards their dependants, and as frequently fail to understand or to influence the people. But the clergy have been the most distinctive products of Scottish Educa-

tion, which, so far from separating them from the people, has really qualified them to be their representatives and teachers. Much of the national love of learning has owed its existence to the way in which scholarship is to be found embodied in the manse, and the dignity it often gives to him who is esteemed as the father even more than the pastor of his people. 'The opportunities to a young man trained under a manse roof are boundless. To him all things may well seem possible. He may come to occupy a wider and a richer world; he may live in cities and universities where learning

is cultivated and culture professed; but the happiest place for the student, and the kindest to the studies that really cultivate and refine, is the inside of a Scotch manse.'

And such was John Thomson's early home. Among his father's books he had abundance of material for reading and reflection, while his study of science developed his habits of observation, so that astronomy, geology, optics, chemistry, and other cognate subjects constantly occupied his thoughts. He not only, it is said, eagerly read all the books he could procure on these subjects, but he early devoted much of his time to the study of their practical bearings.

Over and above all this leaning of his mind to occult problems, he in early boyhood evinced a strong love for the contemplation of Nature, especially in her more romantic and picturesque moods, and a desire to reproduce scenes and effects which struck his fancy. He would often, it is said, stroll to great distances from home to get glimpses of scenery under various aspects. His fancy outstripping the command of suitable material wherewith to realise his conceptions, he was frequently driven to record his impressions on the walls of the house, on pasteboard, paper, or any sort of material that could be operated upon. In this respect he, like Guido Reni, found in the commonest materials an outlet through his fingers for the struggling art-sense within; thus he was known to use charred wood and even candle-snuffings for pencils, while the smooth walls of some of the manse rooms, no doubt to his mother's annoyance, were frequently appropriated and utilised instead of canvas.

Long years after, Robert Scott Lauder, his son-in-law, used to relate a story of an Edinburgh gentleman who happened to be

travelling in the neighbourhood of Thomson's birthplace. He got into conversation with an old country wight on the roadside. Being told where the stranger came from, the countryman said, 'Ye'll ken ane John Thamson, a minister?' 'Oh,' said the gentleman, 'you mean Mr. Thomson of Duddingston, the celebrated painter; do you know him?' 'Me ken him?' said the man, 'I should think sae; it was me that first taught him to pent!'

Whether Thomson was ever sufficiently grateful to this gifted individual, and acknowledged his obligations, we have never been able to discover. Acquisition of knowledge, like blazes of genius, may sometimes be fortuitous; but it is equally true that the most stupendous results frequently follow from contemptible causes. The real facts of the case, we believe, are somewhat as follows: Old Thomas M'Murtrie, the village carpenter, whose snug little cottage, which he called 'The Rone,' stood near to the manse gate, had completed a large chest for a parishioner preparing to emigrate to America. This he was desirous of having suitably embellished for so important a destination, where Art was supposed at that time to be at a discount. Who so able to give it the requisite finishing touches as Johnny Thomson, the minister's young son? Johnny, or 'Jock,' as he was sometimes called by his brothers and sisters, was a great favourite with old Thomas the carpenter, and would spend many an hour in the old man's workshop on his way to and from school. Thomas confided to Jock his wishes in regard to the decoration of the box, and persuaded him, without much difficulty, to paint the picture of a yellow bunting, or bobolink, on the lid. This was done to the evident satisfaction of all concerned, and being

probably one of the earliest commissions which that young gentleman had yet executed, it is not surprising if his employer should have taken some little credit for his after success, and claimed the honour of teaching him to 'pent'!

When young Thomson was told for the first time of his father's intentions as to his future, it seems to have distressed him not a little. In his own unexpressed imagination he had formed the idea that the pursuit of Art was his proper vocation, and we are told the embryo artist actually went on his knees, and with tears in his eyes besought his father to make him a painter rather than a minister. The old gentleman, not thinking much of the prospect which Art held out as a respectable or lucrative employment, but as more a recreation for an idle hour, good-naturedly patted John on the head, and told him to go to his room and study his verbs.

But though endowed with warm affections and a deep veneration for parental authority, the bent of John's genius was more powerful than either. He might study his verbs, but he could not abandon the study of Nature, nor could he deny himself the pleasure of reproducing with the crude materials within his reach such features of the Girvan valley as were daily disclosed to his eye.

The Parish of Dailly has long been celebrated for its pastoral beauty, as well as for the hills and dales with which it is interspersed. Its little glens, with their babbling brooks, their winding paths, and lonely cottages, or the ancient castles and towers that from rock or meadow give point and character to the landscape, combine to make the district a fitting abode for a lover of Nature. It may very fittingly be described in those

lines of 'Delta,' written upon the birthplace of James Thomson, the poet of the *Seasons* :—

'A rural church—some scatter'd cottage roofs
From whose secluded hearths the thin blue smoke
Silently wreathing through the breezeless air
Ascended, mingling with the summer sky—
A rustic bridge, mossy and weather-stained—
A fairy streamlet, singing to itself—
And here and there a venerable tree
In foliage beauty : of these elements,
And only these, the simple scene was formed.'

Nor is it without poetical associations. It has given birth to one of the sweetest of Scotland's minor poets—Hew Ainslie being born at Bargany, the seat of the Earl of Stair; while another, the poet-painter, William Bell Scott, has found a last resting-place within the precincts of its old churchyard.

Born and brought up amidst scenery which appealed strongly to the imagination, it is no wonder that a spirit so deeply imbued with artistic feeling as that of young Thomson should have been easily impressed with its influence, and should have sought to give expression to the inspiration of the art-sense within. As a striking proof of the earnestness with which he courted Nature, it is said he frequently rose as early as two o'clock in the morning, and would travel many miles in order that he might witness the sun rise from the top of Hadyard or Kirkhill, or study some peculiar effect as its rays penetrated the foliage of a wood. He would gradually retire deeper into the wood, and as he retreated would note and contemplate the change of effect, recalling and studying at home

the various aspects of light and shade these presented, until he had mastered their expression.

The study of physical science soon inured young Thomson's mind to look at everything in Nature through the medium of Law. He already regarded with interest every object around him that was individually striking or picturesque, but he was not satisfied until he had mastered all the elements of its constitution. He rightly looked upon the material universe as subject to a code of laws which it required the profoundest intellect to penetrate and the largest capacity to comprehend. Proceeding from this standpoint, his progress as a student of Nature was as certain as it was rapid.

He not only examined with an artist's eye the running stream, its depths and shallows, its banks, with the trees and sedges that clothed them; but he studied especially the laws in virtue of which they were thus and not otherwise. He speedily recognised the fact that the mere mannerist does not represent Nature as she actually is, but builds up a garish piece of effect, with the sole view of striking the fancy of the ignorant and vulgar—not, certainly, to instruct them in the laws of the universe. Thus, having no opportunity of studying and criticising the works of other masters, he was led imperceptibly to fall back on Nature as his teacher and guide. Mere grace of outline and sensuous beauty of expression did not satisfy the demands of his rigidly truthful imagination. He sought a high ideal: he sought after truth, for as one has well said of him, 'without truth, he regarded the most elaborately executed landscape as but a fantastic and idle dream.'

Thus young Thomson, working away in such method and with such materials as the limited facilities of his father's parish supplied, cultivated, in addition to his English and Latin lessons, that artistic

taste which afterwards developed into such rare excellence as to charm thousands of his countrymen when he afterwards came to take up his abode in the Manse of Duddingston.

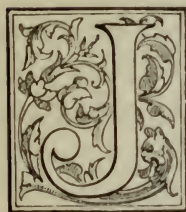
At the age of fourteen he was a tall, wiry, active lad, well endowed with what the old divines called 'pregnant parts.'

His brother Thomas had at length, through the kind assistance of friends, been put on the way of passing for the Bar, and had gone, in the latter part of 1792, to Edinburgh as a law student. Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes—a son-in-law of Lord Kilkerran, his father's parishioner and near neighbour—took a warm interest in his welfare, and must have discovered in the eldest son of the minister of Dailly the qualities which were one day to elucidate the legal and constitutional antiquities of Scotland. But unfortunately Thomas Thomson did not long benefit by his counsels and friendship, as his Lordship died in the winter of the same year. The warm friendship of Lady Hailes and the family was, however, extended through many long years after not only to Thomas but to his younger brother, the subject of our memoir.

CHAPTER II

1793—1805

Edinburgh University—Lodgings in Hamilton's Entry—New Hailes and Lady Hailes—Companions—Sunday Morning Breakfasts—Scott, Jeffrey, Clerk, Erskine—'The Exigencies of the State'—Alexander Nasmyth—Lessons in Painting—Completion of Divinity Course—Licence by Presbytery of Ayr—Ordination at Dailly—Marriage—Rev. John Ramsay of Kirkmichael—Reminiscences—Close of Ministry at Dailly—Presentation to Duddingston.



JOHN THOMSON'S student career was largely influenced by that of his brother. He attended Glasgow University in 1791-92, but the change of Thomas from divinity to law, and his consequent settlement in Edinburgh, led to John's removal from the city of St. Mungo in the following session. Besides, the minister had obtained for his other son, Adam, a situation in the banking house of Sir William Forbes, Bart., through the kind offices of Mr. Thomas Kennedy of Dunure, also one of the minister's parishioners. With a view, therefore, to completing John's studies and preparing him for the ministry, upon which old Mr. Thomson had now more and more set his heart, seeing that his eldest son had abandoned it for the law, it was arranged that the three brothers should lodge together in Edinburgh. John was accordingly in November 1793 entered at the

University of Edinburgh under Professors Dalzell and Hill, and committed to the care of his brother Thomas, 'to be coached for his classes'; but whether the tutor was easy, or the pupil dull, not much progress seems at first to have been made, as in a letter dated 13th November of that year, Thomas, writing to his father as to the welfare of 'the boys,' complains that he has had some 'difficulty to force John to exert his strength.' This elicits from the old man a characteristic reply, in which encouragement rather than reproof is the dominating note accompanied with affectionate solicitude for his children's comfort. 'My dear Jock, I have received accounts of you, and I hope soon to hear from yourself. I have not the smallest doubt that a continued application will make everything easy to you, and that your success will increase with your pleasure.' How wisely the qualification of the 'accounts' he has received is passed over, so that 'Jock' is left oblivious of their purport, whether they were good or bad! while the inference as to difficulties being overcome by 'continued application' must have stimulated the laziest youth with any conscience to renewed exertion. Then the letter winds up with a catechism, prompted doubtless by good Mrs. Thomson, as to their victuals;—how they breakfasted, dined, and supped; what clothing they were wearing, etc. etc., and warning them against the dangers of draughts, cold feet, and damp clothes!

The three young men, Thomas, Adam, and John, had established themselves in lodgings in Hamilton's Entry, Bristo Street, owned by a Mr. Shepherd, described as 'a civil, handy fellow.' But though poor, and in humble quarters, they were fortunate in having the *entrée* to the best society Edinburgh could afford. Lady Hailes manifested her regard for her old minister's sons by having them frequently at her fine country residence of New Hailes, near Mussel-

burgh, when their professional engagements allowed. Thus in the early part of November 1793 Thomas mentioned: 'We all walked out to New Hailes on Saturday last. Mr. Ferguson arrived there on Sunday. I returned to town with him in the evening; the boys on Monday in Lady Hailes' coach.' Again, in a letter dated 27th December 1793, Thomas informs his father: 'John and I have been holding our Christmas at New Hailes. . . . Everybody is employed in feasting and making merry.' A glorious place it was for 'the boys' for other things besides 'feasting and merry-making,' though these would not be despised. The magnificent library of books gathered within its walls by Lord Hailes must have been a literary treasure-house for the growing antiquarian tastes of the young advocate; while John must have found in the pictures which still adorn its walls something to admire and study.

That by this time John had profited by his father's counsel, and had begun to settle down to his tasks, is shown by a letter from Thomas in which he says: 'John's Latin lessons begin to be a good deal easier than at first, and the whole now sits lighter on him.' 'I think,' he continues, 'he will in a short time acquire habits of close application.' Eventually he proved to be a diligent enough student; made the acquisition of a competent knowledge of literature, and, specially devoted a large portion of his time and attention to philosophy and science, his readings in this direction being wide and varied.

But Mr. Shepherd's lodging in Hamilton's Entry was not a mere cell of study and penance. Social and intellectual enjoyment found within its four walls a hearty welcome, and the long winter nights were often brightened by gatherings of young kindred spirits, whose aspirations were, like those of Thomas, to the prizes of the legal

profession. Hamilton's Entry was, in fact, a rendezvous of many of the younger men then at the Bar, or qualifying for that distinction, many of whom afterwards rose to eminence. Among others that might be named there were Francis Jeffrey, William Erskine (afterwards Lord Kinnedder), William Clerk, and Walter Scott. There these young aspirants to fame read German together, and no doubt compared notes on that discursive reading to which they—and especially Scott—were all addicted. From the interesting Memoir of Thomas Thomson by Cosmo Innes, published by the Bannatyne Club, it appears that Scott found the lodging in Hamilton's Entry 'an agreeable retreat from the dull office in George Square, and liked especially to steal away there to breakfast on Sunday mornings.' John Thomson used to speak with delight half a century afterwards of the conversations of Scott and his brother Thomas, in which he assisted *as a listener*, at these gay Sunday breakfasts in Bristo Street.

Naturally of a retiring disposition, John appears at first to have had a difficulty in accommodating himself to the highly intellectual atmosphere in which his brother moved. He felt like a man out of his depth, and occasional longings for his colour-box and his music would no doubt obtrude themselves on his Latin and other studies. For him music had great attractions. He played the flute well, and a desire to be possessed of a violin and to be able to perform on it had seized him. When his brother's companions were busy discussing the politics or literature of the day, John no doubt felt himself a 'nobody' among them, and he, honest soul, would probably have been glad to solace himself with a tune, or, in quiet, to have worked over some favourite landscape.

But these luxuries had sometimes to be foregone. The limited income of the minister could ill afford excessive demands; for pinching and paring were necessary to keep the young men at college. Once, in a letter by the young advocate—26th February 1797—to the minister of Dailly, acknowledging receipt of a sum of money to assist ‘the boys’ at their studies, he says: ‘John has for the present relinquished his scheme of buying a fiddle, and has patriotically contributed the money to the Exigencies of the State’—that is, of their joint purse—not at that time, we fear, over well plenished, ‘which,’ he continues, ‘will, I hope, save us from making further demands upon you at present.’ But more important matters were in hand than fiddle-playing; and the future minister did well to ‘relinquish’ it just then. Though too young to keep step in conversation with his brother’s companions, his modest position as an attentive ‘listener’ no doubt exerted an important influence in the formation of his character, and certainly he fully appreciated the advantages of being admitted into such a circle. Scott himself used to say: ‘Frank Jeffrey is a wonderful man; he reminds me of the Princess in the fairy tale of “The Well at the World’s End,” for he never opens his mouth without diamonds and rubies dropping out of it’; and of Scott the same, it will be remembered, was said by Captain Hall, ‘That his mouth he cannot open without giving out something worth hearing, and all so simply, good-naturedly, and naturally.’

That Thomson had powers of expression of no common kind in spite of his modesty we do not require to say. As a member of the Dialectic Society connected with the University, to which he was admitted in January 1799, he evinced a lively interest in its proceedings, and contributed in that same year at least one

paper. It was an essay entitled the *Poems of Orpheus*, 'Orpheus of Highwaymen' being a title popularly given to John Gay on account of his famous play the 'Beggar's Opera,' which, according to Sir John Fielding, was never represented 'without creating an additional number of thieves.'

During the years John Thomson remained at college, both at

Glasgow and Edinburgh, he had but little time to spare for painting. In the summer months, however, in the vacation, he assiduously pursued his favourite study, sketching and painting from Nature; and in the course of his last session in Edinburgh—whether with or without the approval of his worthy father, we cannot say—he took a month's lessons under Alex-



DAILY CHURCH, AYRSHIRE

ander Nasmyth, a Scotch landscapist of no mean merit, and father of Patrick Nasmyth, whose pictures are even more celebrated as works of art.

On attaining his twenty-first year he had practically completed

his studies for the ministry, and was duly licensed on 17th July 1799 by the Presbytery of Ayr as a preacher of the Gospel. His father, unfortunately, did not survive to witness his younger son's admission to the calling he had from his infancy predetermined for him, having died on the 19th February previous.

Young Thomson had not long to wait for a charge. Strong influence was brought to bear on the Crown, with whom lay the patronage of Dailly, and he was presented by George III. to his father's place as minister of the Parish. His ordination by the Presbytery took place on 24th April 1800. Though barely of age to be eligible for so important an office, he appears to have been equal to its duties, if we may judge from a letter written at this time by Mr. George Cranstoun, afterwards Lord Corehouse, to his brother Thomas, in which he describes John as 'having talents more than equal to the situation; though I believe scarcely any other young man at his age, and with so little previous study, would have been qualified for so serious a charge. He must preach next Sunday from that text: "Let him that hath no sin among you throw the first stone."'

If early initiated into the cares of the ministry, Thomson early sought and obtained the assistance of a helpmeet.

Within a year after his ordination the young minister had courted and gained the affections of Miss Isabella Ramsay, the eldest daughter of the minister of the adjoining parish of Kirk-michael. They were shortly afterwards married (7th July 1801). Miss Ramsay undoubtedly was of a good stock, and by her exemplary courtesy to all with whom she came in contact, and by her thrifty household management, did much to keep up the traditional good name of the Dailly manse. Her father, the Rev. John Ramsay,

died shortly before the marriage. He was a man of much shrewdness, and though a minister by profession, was among the first who gave themselves to farming enterprise in the district. He formed, and was the first President of, the Carrick Farmers' Society, and largely stimulated the agricultural improvement of what had hitherto been a rather backward part of Ayrshire. His advice to John Thomson after his ordination contains some pawky sagacity which it may not be out of place to repeat here. 'John,' he said, 'I was your father's friend, and now I am your friend, and I gie ye a word o' advice which ye mauna tak ill. First, keep aye the fear o' God; second, keep aye your feet on the crown o' the causeway; and third, do your duty, sir, and ne'er speir what the folks say o' ye.'

Opinion in the parish seems to have differed in respect to the young minister's observance of the latter part of Mr. Ramsay's advice; for while it was clear he did not condescend to ask what his people were saying about him, had he been open to listen, he might have found that not a few were thinking he was not doing his duty, or, at all events, if he could not be charged with neglect of duty, they thought he was taking up his attention with occupations not usually engaged in by a minister of the Gospel. Reminiscences of these days are still current among the parishioners of Dailly, and from one whose professional work takes him much among them, we learn that he was frequently to be seen with his sketch-book or easel in the woods of Bargany, Kilkerran, or Dalquharn. Where there is a will there is generally found the way, and the study of Nature in Thomson's case impelled him, in spite of what might be said or thought about it, to prosecute his artistic propensities with increasing zest. Outdoor sketching and indoor painting, alternating with ministerial duties to a large,

widely-scattered, and populous parish, left no spare time for idleness, at all events. He might be seen sitting for hours before an old tree at Maxweltown, or by the side of the Girvan water; but the Dailly people could not understand it. Such devotion to painting pictures showed conclusively that he had what they called 'a bee in his bonnet'; and some of them at least formed the opinion that a minister who painted pictures and played on the fiddle was not quite orthodox, and could be no safe spiritual guide for them. A few actually left the church, and travelled Sunday after Sunday to the Burgher Kirk in Maybole—seven miles from Dailly—in quest of what they deemed more wholesome spiritual fare.

Notwithstanding this, however, and the fact that he was early involved in the cares and anxieties attendant upon a young family, Thomson's enthusiasm for Art rather increased than abated. He painted, we are told, a considerable number of pictures during these first few years, most of which were distributed as gifts among his friends. Nor did he confine himself to landscape; several portraits of more intimate acquaintances which he attempted testified, it is said, to his accuracy of perception and ability to delineate the human form divine.

We have, unfortunately, not been able to verify this statement by our own observation. In all probability these early essays at portraiture, if they have not perished, have been lost sight of. If still in existence, they are, we fear, beyond hope of identification. He himself, it is said, used to express the wish that he had preserved these early specimens of his style in portrait-painting.

One amusing story is told, illustrative of his strong artistic proclivity, which we cannot refrain from recording.

In those days the half-yearly communions were the occasion

of special demonstration in every parish, and the 'Holy Fair' of Burns describes with graphic pen the scenes with which these occasions were too much identified, especially in Ayrshire.

Usually several ministers from neighbouring parishes were engaged to take a part at those sacramental observances, and as the crowd of country people who made it a duty to attend was often greater than the church could accommodate, 'a tent'¹ was fitted up in the churchyard, where preaching and exhortation could be carried on while the communion was being dispensed in the church. On this particular occasion the communion was being dispensed in the neighbouring parish of Barr, and Mr. Thomson was present. Being the youngest minister of the Presbytery, it devolved on him to preach first from the 'tent'; and having done so he sat down and gave place to an older minister. Looking round upon the rustic congregation, his artistic eye was arrested by a strikingly picturesque face and figure from the hills; that of a venerable old man, whose lyart haffets,² light-blue coat, with large brass buttons, knee-breeches, buckles on his shoes, and quaint old three-cornered hat, proclaimed him one of a former century. The temptation was too strong to be resisted, even on so solemn an occasion, and Thomson's pencil and paper were at once in requisition, and he was soon engrossed sketching the physiognomy of douce old John Allan. But if not observed by the congregation, the sketching had not escaped the eye of some of the members of his Presbytery. Ever ready, then as now, to rebuke the erring and to correct the faults of backsliders, these gentlemen gathered together in council after the service and solemnly discussed the grave impro-

¹ This was an outside pulpit of wood, with a covering as a protection against the weather, not unlike a 'Punch and Judy' show.

² Long grey locks.

priety of their young brother, and though reluctant to make a 'case' of it, the oldest of their number was deputed to take an early opportunity of 'dealing' with him privately. This opportunity occurred shortly afterwards in the manse of Kirkoswald, at the next communion. Here the old man proceeded, with grave face and solemn voice, to administer a suitable admonition and rebuke, all which the Reverend John, listening in silence, appeared to receive in meek submission. With downcast eyes fixed on his nervous fingers carelessly toying with his pencil at the table, and giving only an occasional shy glance at the face of his faithful mentor, he waited patiently to the end. The old gentleman, thinking, no doubt, he had made a favourable impression, and would be in the happy position of reporting to the members of Presbytery the penitence of the culprit and a satisfactory conclusion of the case, was highly pleased at Thomson's behaviour. But what was his horror when, at the close of his remarks, his supposed penitent held up before his astonished eyes a thumb-nail sketch, showing a laughable likeness of the old gentleman's face, and smilingly asked, 'What auld cankered carl do ye think that is?'

But the minister's sins of commission were not confined to painting. We have already referred to his musical tastes. He had not only when at college acquired a fiddle, but he had practised it with such assiduity that he was quite an adept, and would spend hours at it in the long winter evenings, to the great delight of his little household. Both the violin and violincello he played with wonderful skill. Among the more straightlaced of his parishioners their young minister's talents in this respect went for less than nothing. They looked upon it as a scandal to his profession that so much of his time should be spent on what they considered

frivolous amusements, and several of the elders were moved to wait upon him on the subject. They did so, and were most courteously received by the minister and his wife. Having explained the object of their visit, they proceeded apologetically to refer to the rumours that were floating about in the parish, urging that it was not so much the 'big gaucy fiddle' they objected to as the 'wee sinfu' fiddle'! Thomson heard them good-naturedly, and then asked



GIRVAN VALLEY AT BARGANY

them if they would like to hear a tune. Though not quite prepared for this, the elders made no objections to the proposal; the violincello was brought into the parlour, and he played a selection of fine old Scotch airs with such pathos and feeling that, as a granddaughter of his has told us, they were fairly melted to tears, and so impressed with what they called its 'holy hum,' no more objections were ever raised to his playing either the 'big gaucy fiddle' or the 'wee sinfu' one!

Five years of busy active life had now passed over his head as minister of his native parish. He was himself happy, and he endeavoured to make others happy as well. He was blessed with a loving wife and a young family, consisting of two boys and an infant daughter. All his family ties and affections were bound up with the people among whom he had been born and brought up, and over whom he had since his father's death had the spiritual oversight; while the familiar scenes of many a sketching expedition o'er hill and dale, by running brook or pastoral meadow, were all associated with his earliest years, and doubtless kept a strong and loving hold of his heart.

But the happy days of his early manhood amid the sylvan loveliness of the Girvan Water came to a close ere long.

His old friends in Edinburgh had not forgotten the 'listener,' and took the first opportunity of recalling him to the capital. Through the death of the Rev. William Bennet, minister of Duddingston, a vacancy occurred in that parish in 1805. The presentation to the benefice lay with the principal heritor, the Marquis of Abercorn, for whom Mr. Thomas Scott, Writer to the Signet, and brother of Walter Scott, then acted as factor for the Duddingston estates. Thomas Thomson, John's elder brother, and Walter Scott being fast friends, the latter easily persuaded his brother to use his influence with the Marquis on behalf of the young minister. Accordingly, towards the end of the same year, the church and parish of Duddingston were offered to and accepted by Mr. Thomson, and the usual formal proceedings consequent on such a step were at once begun.

CHAPTER III

1805—1813

Duddingston Church and Parish—Thomson's Induction—The Manse—Artistic Fervour—Ordination of Walter Scott to the Eldership—Scott a Presbyterian—Member of General Assembly—Baptism of Scott's Youngest Child by Thomson—Scott's Views on Episcopacy *versus* Presbyterianism—Lockhart's *Life of Scott*—Death of Mrs. Thomson—'Grecian' Williams—Sir Francis Grant—Sir David Wilkie—J. M. W. Turner—Duddingston Loch in Winter—The Duddingston Curling Club—Principal Baird.



THE first step in the necessary proceedings in connection with Mr. Thomson's removal from Dailly and induction to the charge of Duddingston took place on 25th September. At a meeting of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, held on that day, Mr. Thomas Scott, the agent for the Marquis of Abercorn, appeared and laid on the table a presentation from his Lordship—who is described in the Records as the undoubted patron'—'in favour of the Rev. John Thomson, minister of Dailly.' Thereupon the Presbytery agreed to meet at Duddingston on the 10th day of October 'to moderate in a call' from the congregation. In those days the rights of patrons were practically absolute, but the gift of the benefice or living carried with it almost invariably the consent of the people. Seldom was it called in question. Still the law had made a provision—it might or might not be a fiction

or a farce—whereby no presentee to a benefice could be legally ordained by the Presbytery without first receiving, in addition, a ‘call’ from the people. The Presbytery accordingly met in Duddingston Church, the Rev. James Robertson, minister of South Leith, presiding and preaching, after which the ‘call’ was signed by the congregation. But that did not finish the business; the call must next be ‘prosecuted’

before the Presbytery of which the presentee was a member, which was the Presbytery of Ayr. Commissioners were accordingly appointed for this purpose, consisting of five ministers and one elder, and these gentlemen presented the call to that court on the 16th October, stating their reasons why the minister of Dailly should be ‘loosed’ from his present charge. This was reported at a meeting of the Edinburgh Presbytery on 2nd



THE ‘LOUPING-ON STANE,’ DUDDINGSTON
KIRK

November to have been all done in proper form, and so far, what is called the ‘moderation of the call’ was complete, after the ‘serving of the edict’ upon the congregation. On the 14th November the Presbytery again met in Duddingston Church, with the congregation, and after divine service conducted by the Moderator, Dr. John Campbell of the Tolbooth Church, intimation was given that the process for Mr. Thomson’s translation ‘had

been regularly carried out and finished before the proper judicatory, and his edict being duly served, and this day returned without objections, they were now prepared to admit him to the new charge.' As the Records of the Presbytery go on to state, 'the Moderator then called on Mr. Thomson and read to him the questions appointed by Act of Assembly to be put to such as are admitted to new charges, to which Mr. Thomson having given satisfactory answers, the Moderator, in name and by authority of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, admitted him to be the minister of the church and Parish of Duddingston. The brethren present then gave Mr. Thomson the right hand of fellowship, and he and the congregation were suitably exhorted by the Moderator. After the congregation were dismissed Mr. Thomson signed the formula and his name was added to the Roll.'

Such was the simple order of procedure in the Scottish Presbyterian Church in those days. It is an order that is still carried through in similar cases in the Established Church, with this difference, that patronage has since been abolished by Act of Parliament, its place being taken entirely by the call of the people. Among the clerical members of Presbytery who assembled that day to welcome Mr. Thomson to Duddingston were such men as Dr. Grieve of the Old Church, Dr. John Thomson of the New North Church, Dr. James Robertson of South Leith, Dr. Inglis of Old Greyfriars (father of the late Lord President), Dr. M'Knight of Trinity College Church, and several others. The laity are not reported upon; but there is every likelihood that among those in the body of the church would be found many of Thomson's old Edinburgh friends, such as his brother Thomas, with probably Walter Scott and his brother Thomas, the factor. Considering the

interest these had taken in his welfare, the probability is they would be present on so auspicious an occasion as his induction.

Be that as it may, Thomson's translation to Duddingston in this autumn of 1805 opened up for him a new and wider field, and brought him more closely into contact with men of culture in the scientific, literary, and artistic world, as well as the leading spirits among the clergy of the Church of Scotland.

A peculiar interest attaches to any house in which a great man has lived—it is as if its atmosphere had somehow been lifted out of the commonplace by the clinging reminiscences of a temperament abnormal in efficiency and thought. It becomes in our imagination identified with his daily life, and to form a part of his being; and though the dwelling survives while the owner is dead, one

sight of the house recalls the dead past. The Manse at Duddingston is beautiful for situation; for Thomson it had many attractions, and in course of time it gathered round it many cherished associations.

The scenery of his new neighbourhood was for one thing peculiarly fitted to keep alive his love of the picturesque and the beautiful. The landscape which surrounded the pretty manse where



DUDDINGSTON KIRK

he had now taken up his abode, and where he was destined for the next thirty-five years to live a peaceful, prosperous, and useful life, honoured alike by high and low, rich and poor, was just such as a poet-artist might desire. No fairer scene can in broad Scotland be found. Combining as it does all the elements of picturesque variety with historic interest, bounded by the distant Pentland and Lammermoor Hills, it presents aspects of Nature both rugged and sublime, sylvan and rustic, but never tame. In the middle distance stands out prominently the old feudal Castle of Craigmillar, with its historic associations connecting it with Sir Simon Preston and Queen Mary. Fields and meadows intervene with fertile breadths of cornland and pasture; while peeping out from among the trees on the west may be seen the suburbs of Edinburgh and the old mansion of Prestonfield; on the east, the mansion and policies of Duddingston. At our feet lies shimmering in the sun the placid waters of Duddingston Loch, ever and anon broken by the rattling skirr of the coots and water-hens disporting upon its bosom, its sedgy banks and willow-trees affording them ample cover. Over all tower the majestic cliffs of Arthur Seat, presenting on its south side as bold a front as any Highland Ben.

If anything is wanted to complete the picture it is amply filled by the little church on the knoll, surrounded with its graves and tombstones, where 'the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.' Rugged and time-worn, it still stands with its pinnacles and tower a relic of twelfth century piety, and still calls worshippers within its portals.

Amid surroundings such as these, the heart of the young minister awoke with a fresh increase of artistic fervour. Nature in her

loveliest aspects lay before him demanding his acknowledgment, and he was not slow to respond. What was better, he found in his new sphere an appreciative public, who speedily recognised his merit and were anxious to secure specimens of his work.

At Dailly he distributed landscapes among his friends, who perhaps thought very little of them except as being the hand-work of their minister. At Duddingston he began to find they had a marketable value, and accepted payment. 'The first picture,' says Alexander Smith, 'was sold for fifteen guineas, and the artist, it is said, was so startled by the mighty sum, that it was only when Mr. Williams, the delineator of Greek scenery, whom he consulted on the subject, told him that the work was worth three times as much, that he could comfortably consign the coins to his breeches pocket.'

Nor did this devotion to Art in his Duddingston manse lessen his interest in and devotion to his more clerical duties as minister of the parish. The records of the Kirk Session of this period do not certainly give us much insight into the condition of the congregation, or of its pastoral supervision; but we have been assured by good authorities that Mr. Thomson performed his duties to his people faithfully for all that.



OLD DOORWAY, DUDDINGSTON CHURCH

In 1806 occurred an episode in the history of Duddingston Kirk worthy of more than a passing notice: this was the admission of Walter Scott as a member of its Kirk Session, and a ruling elder in the Church of Scotland.

It would appear that the eldership in the church had been reduced to three members—Mr. Andrew Bennet of Muckraw, John Thomson of Priorlathan, and John Robertson, session clerk. Suitable persons resident in the parish were scarce, and though not strictly on the lines of Presbyterian order, it was resolved to add the names of several gentlemen who had only a nominal connection with the parish. Accordingly on the 12th of March, at a meeting of the Kirk Session held in Edinburgh, Mr. Thomson being moderator or chairman, Thomas Scott, W.S., Walter Scott, Advocate, William Clerk, Advocate, and Thomas Miller, W.S., were nominated for office, subject to the approval of the congregation. That formality having been gone through on Sabbath the 16th March, their ordination was performed on the 30th of the same month, all except Thomas Scott appearing for ordination.

The fact of so many lawyers, all of them only slightly connected with the parish, being thus brought forward has induced the belief that the whole transaction was carried through for personal motives. At the beginning of the century, and for many years afterwards, the office of ruling elder was much coveted by the practitioners at the Scottish Bar as a means of access to participation in the forensic debates of the General Assembly.

This was a practice that was probably to the advantage of the legal profession; but the admission of men to the office whose care was more for their own promotion than for the interests of the Church, was, it may be feared, ultimately detrimental to the cause of religion.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt it was to the legal profession Mr. Thomson went for an increase to his Kirk Session at this time.

Walter Scott, certainly the greatest name in the quartette, then in the zenith of his poetical fame, was known as the author of *Border Ballads* of no mean order, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*; but as yet he had not tasted that greater fame which afterwards



THE MANSE AND CURLING-HOUSE, DUBDINGSTON

came to him through his prose romances, for *Waverley* had not yet been published.

William Clerk of Eldin, Scott's early companion, his coadjutor as a clerk of session, and his prototype of *Darsie Latimer*, was, like Scott, a frequent visitor at the manse. For him the manse had special attractions before even Thomson's day, for there he had wooed and won the fair daughter of Thomson's predecessor—Miss Margaret Bennet.

In their excursions, whether by land or sea, Scott and Clerk were inseparable, and many of the characters afterwards delineated in the Novels were recollections of events and people then encountered by them in their rambles.

Thomas Scott, as factor on the Duddingston estate, had considerable influence with the farmers of the parish, and doubtless had his share in furthering the matter. Though formally elected, he never appears to have presented himself for ordination, and, with the exception of Walter Scott (if one may judge from the Records of the Kirk Session), none of the four seem afterwards to have acted in their capacity of elders in Duddingston Kirk, or interfered in the affairs of the congregation.

That in the later years of his life Walter Scott identified himself to some extent with the Episcopalian Church there can be little doubt. Lady Scott's and the family sympathies were undoubtedly in that direction, and much intermittent controversy has arisen in consequence, by the attempt to prove that Scott was an Episcopalian also. For reasons best known to himself, Lockhart in his life of the great novelist does not breathe a word of the incident we have mentioned, though it is difficult to believe he could have been ignorant of it; but the fact remains that up to 1806 and for some years afterwards Scott was not only a member of the Church of Scotland, but an active office-bearer.

In the April following his election and ordination in Duddingston Kirk he was elected by the Magistrates and Council of Selkirk as their representative commissioner and ruling elder to the General Assembly. He held the same appointment in 1807, and took up his commission on both occasions. But not only did Scott take his seat in the supreme court of the Church, he was a member

of Presbytery as well. From a minute of Duddingston Kirk Session of 15th December 1806, we find him then chosen to represent them in the Presbytery of Edinburgh and Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale. His signature to the formula engrossed in the Session Records, in which, in accordance with the Act of 1694, 'he sincerely owns and declares the Confession of Faith as ratified by law in 1690' to be the confession of his faith, 'the Presbyterian form of government of the Church by Kirk Sessions, etc. etc., to be the only government of this Church,' and his 'determination to submit thereto and never endeavour directly or indirectly the prejudice or subversion thereof,' may still be seen, the first of a long list of elders appointed in after years.

It may not be clear at what precise date Scott united himself to the Episcopal body, if at all. There is no evidence that he ever was admitted by the rite of confirmation; but it is remarkable that before this time his three eldest children had been baptized by Dr. Sandford, an Episcopalian, probably in deference to the feelings of his wife, who had been brought up in the Church of England, while the fourth, Charles, born in 1805, was baptized by Mr. Thomson of Duddingston, the year before his father's ordination as an elder.

The record of the baptism in Scott's family Bible runs thus: '24 Decem. 1805.—M. C. Scott apud Edinburgum puerum edidit; qui baptizatus erat per virum reverendum Ioannem Thomson, Ministrum de Duddingstone prope Edinburgum, nomenque Carolus illi datum.'

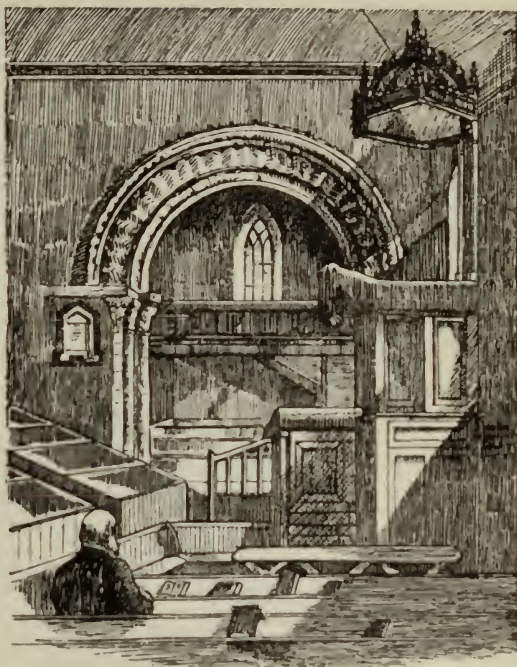
It is probable that after his marriage Scott consented to accompany his wife to the Episcopal Church; but his recurrence to a Presbyterian minister for the baptism of his youngest child seems to indicate a return to the Church of his fathers, followed by his becoming an elder and a member of General Assembly.

Whether or not we must accept Lockhart's statement that 'he took up a repugnance' to the Presbyterian mode of worship, and came to believe that the Episcopal system of government and discipline was 'the fairest model of the primitive polity,' is a different question. It is likely enough that his preference for the Episcopal service was more a matter of taste than a question of principle. It is certain that he greatly admired its beautiful collects and litanies; but so do many Presbyterians. As to questions of doctrine, discipline, and forms of worship, Scott's private opinion was probably that which he put into the mouth of Mr. Pleydell in *Guy Mannering*. Pleydell, it will be remembered, took Mannering to Greyfriars' Church, where they heard Erskine preach; and he afterwards told Mannering how Erskine was the leader of one party, and his colleague, Robertson, the leader of another party in the Church, while they yet preserved the closest personal regard and esteem for each other. 'And you, Mr. Pleydell,' said Mannering, 'what do you think of their points of difference?' 'Why, I hope, Colonel,' was the reply, 'a plain man may go to heaven without thinking about them at all; besides, *inter nos*, I am a member of the suffering and Episcopal Church of Scotland—the shadow of a shade now, and fortunately so; but I love to pray where my fathers prayed before me, without thinking worse of the Presbyterian forms, because they do not affect me with the same associations.' When these words were written there is the strongest presumption that Scott put his own sentiments into the mouth of Pleydell, and that he thought little if at all about the differences of churches and church parties as matters of principle; and that even when tastes and family associations drew him into the Episcopal Church it was 'without thinking worse of the Presbyterian forms,' and without in any way

altering his opinion that it was on the whole a fortunate thing for Scotland that the Episcopal Church had become the 'shadow of a shade.'

We are not, however, at present so much concerned with Scott's later views, whatever they may have been, but with an interesting incident in his life, over which his biographer has chosen to draw the veil.

The solemn service of ordination to the eldership as practised in the Church of Scotland is simple but impressive; without ritualistic pomp or ostentatious show. We may picture to ourselves the quaint interior of the little old-fashioned Norman church of Duddingston,



INTERIOR OF DUDDINGSTON CHURCH

its pointed windows, its fine old chancel arch, its plain wooden pulpit and precentor's desk, with the big hour-glass, down which 'the sands of time' are slowly trickling; the square old-fashioned family pews, each with its little table covered with green cloth; the elders' seat upon which all eyes are now centred, where stands the second Wizard of the North with

his brother elders, taking upon them the vows of office. In front of all is the tall, handsome figure of Mr. Thomson, the pastor, demurely draped in black Geneva gown and bands, addressing in turn the congregation and the new office-bearers as to their relative duties and obligations to each other. It is a curious concatenation of circumstances which thus brings together in a solemn ecclesiastical function two such men—the poet and the painter of their day.

Such a scene might well have formed a not unfitting subject for the easel of Sir David Wilkie or Robert Scott Lauder.

But to return to our subject.

Thomson, though by no means neglecting his parochial duties, was meanwhile using his brush with such effect that his artistic powers were being largely recognised and appreciated. Artists and friends began to see that the Duddingston minister showed in his pictures and sketches something above the commonplace. It was felt that in his delineation there was something more than a mere portrait of a particular place; that what he represented might not indeed be an accurate transcript of what it professed to be, but yet was a powerful interpretation of Nature in her various moods and aspects such as only one with a true artistic genius could paint.

Orders began to pour in upon him from all quarters in such numbers that, with all his rapidity of execution, he found difficulty in supplying the demands of his friends for his pictures.

In the spring of 1809 a severe calamity overtook him in the sudden death of Mrs. Thomson (18th April), leaving him with the care of a young family of four children, of whom the youngest was an infant only two weeks old.

This was undoubtedly a heavy blow, enough to crush the spirit

of a sensitive mind like his ; but he bore it with resignation, and sought to overcome its depressing influence by renewed activity ; ‘ with unabated energy,’ we are told, ‘ devoting himself to the responsible duties of his situation, but never for a moment ceasing from the cultivation of his art.’

Among the Edinburgh artists of that time who deemed it a privilege to be associated with him either privately or in the interests of Art, there were none whose society gave him greater satisfaction than that of Hugh W. Williams, who, after his visit to Greece a few years later, when he returned with a large stock of exquisite water-colour drawings of classic scenery, was better known as ‘ Grecian ’ Williams. They formed a strong and lasting friendship for each other. They were frequent companions in their sketching tours, and in each other’s society found much sympathetic fellowship. Their enthusiasm and energy in the pursuit of ‘ subjects ’ and ‘ effects ’ were remarkable, for they would frequently rise in the early morning to witness and study the morning light from the dawn until the sun had risen above the horizon. They would afterwards compare notes of their observations and sketches, ‘ discussing their merits ’—says one who knew them—‘ with the feelings of disinterested critics, or rather of parties anxious to discover their artistic and other defects. They would return again and again, and re-sketch the same subject, until they had brought their sketches up to the desired point of excellence.’ We wonder how many of our Academicians of the present day work together in such confiding harmony ?

Thomson had a wonderfully attractive power ; and the magnetic influence which draws kindred spirits within one social circle led him into not only the acquaintanceship but the active friendship

of many distinguished men. His open-handed kindness of disposition and the warm hospitality of the manse made it and its occupant one of the centres of social resort, not only by the representatives of the literary and legal world, but by artists of distinction from the sister kingdom.

From the neighbouring city Thomson's frequent guests were Walter Scott, John Clerk of Eldin, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Will Clerk, Jeffrey, Cockburn, David Brewster, Professor Wilson, James Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd,¹ his brother Thomas Thomson, and many others too numerous to name; while many distinguished strangers visiting Edinburgh participated frequently in his hospitality. Among these it is of interest to note such men as Sir Francis Grant, Sir David Wilkie, J. M. W. Turner, William Bell Scott, Mr. Horsman, M.P., etc., all of whom acknowledged the rare artistic talent of the minister, and delighted to exchange views with him and enjoy his society.

Walter Scott, it is said, enjoyed nothing better than to spend a summer evening in the manse garden, under the shade of the fine old ash-tree, which stood until 1895, a relic of its former self, viewing the placid loch at his feet with its teeming population of aquatic fowl.

In winter as well as in summer Duddingston has its attractions. Its pretty little loch, so close to Edinburgh, and yet so secluded, has always been a favourite resort. Artists, botanists, and naturalists of all kinds find here ample material for study and recreation; but the recreations for which it is best known, perhaps, and most largely appreciated, are the winter sports of curling and skating. Then its waters come under the spell of Jack Frost, and its surface, instead of being a safe and pleasant refuge for swans, ducks, and

other waterfowl, becomes from the Hangman's Crag to the manse a sheet of glittering ice.

Then is the time to see Duddingston Loch at its best. Its surface covered with an animated mass of human beings; the trees that fringe its eastern side covered with hoarfrost, and Arthur Seat clothed in a mantle of white, only the purple and brown of the overhanging crags standing out bold and sharp against their setting of snow.

'Tis when Winter his white robe o'er Arthur has flung,
And the Loch at its base under icy chains thrown,'

that we have a picture which, once seen, can never be forgotten.

The old and distinctively Scotch game of curling has for long been identified with Duddingston; and though of late years the various clubs of Edinburgh have provided themselves with ponds more reserved from the throng of visitors and more easily frozen over, its historical association with the metropolitan authorities and with the leading men of the bar, the church, the university, the army, and the medical profession, have made the Duddingston Curling Club celebrated throughout the country. Founded over a hundred years ago, it embraced among its members the names of many of the leading Scotsmen of the day, a large preponderance, curiously enough, being of the legal and clerical professions; and no society of the kind ever numbered in its ranks such a company of peers, baronets, judges, and representatives of the different learned professions. Among them are to be found Lords Murray, Cockburn, Ivory, Colonsay, Moncreiff, Fullarton, Cunningham, Jeffrey, and Gillies; the Marquis of Queensberry and the Marquis of Abercorn; Principal Baird of

the University—one of the keenest of curlers, who never missed being at a meeting—Professor Dunbar, Professor Ritchie, and ministers too numerous to mention.

Mr. Thomson brought with him from his Ayrshire parish his love of the 'roaring game,' and in January 1807, at a meeting in the Curlers' Hall, Duddingston, he, along with his brother Adam, were formally admitted as members of the club. His predecessor, the Rev. William Bennet, parish minister of Duddingston, held the office of chaplain to the club till his death in 1805, but the mantle did not fall on Mr. Thomson, this office being filled for a long series of years afterwards by Dr. David Ritchie, minister of St. Andrew's Church. During these early years of the century Thomson seems to have gone into the spirit of the game with great zest, and the minute-book furnishes us with some notes which indicate how much he and his clerical brethren relished the sport. Principal Baird was the life and moving spirit of the club, and however busy he might otherwise be, his name seldom fails to appear in the records as being present at a match or a dinner. Here are a few recorded notes of these matches. They are curious in their way.

'Novem. 23rd, 1807. Ice excellent. 28th. Ice good. Clerical party gained four games. 30th. Clerical party gained two games. . . . Decem. 20th, 1808. Ice good. Jan. 1809. Ice soft. Messrs. Thomson, Dick, and Muir, against three of the club. The latter gained, 13-10. 22nd. Ice excellent. 23rd. Began to snow soon after game commenced. Jany. 5th, 1809. Clerical party—Dr. Baird, Rev. Messrs. Dick, Ramsay, and Muir—against Mr. Miller and members belonging to the law, 31-16; 2nd game, 15-8. . . . 14th. Ice after a long thaw uncommonly fine; Linning and Muir the only members out, between whom a match took place; gained by the former—afterwards joined by Mr. Thomson. . . . 18th. Ice

good—and play evidently keen, as we find one of the clericals actually indulging in a little gambling on the result, for “Mr. Millar lost five shillings betting against Muir.” 20th. Dr. Baird, Rev. J. Thomson, Rev. Jas. Ramsay, Rev. Jas. Muir, against David Ewart, junr., Lorimer, Gibson and Thos. Crichton; began at eleven o’clock and finished the game after four; former 31-26.

‘21st. Rev. J. Thomson, Messrs. Ewart, Goldie, and Muir against Messrs. Linning, Miller . . . and Ewart. 1st game, former 13-10; 2nd game, 13-7; 3rd game, 13-3. [On this occasion, when Mr. Thomson was skip of his rink, he appears to have carried all before him.] 23rd. Dr. Baird, Rev. J. Thomson, Rev. J. Ramsay, Rev. James Muir, against Messrs. Crichton, Johnson, Scott, and Bairnsfather; scored 21-20, the clericals again having the best of it.

‘Jany. 18th, 1809. Rev. J. Thomson and Rev. J. Muir, skips against Linning and Scott. Again the clericals are victorious, 39-13. There was a long period of frost this month, and much playing. . . . 19th. Ice on Loeh good; another excellent day’s amusement. 20th. Clerical party—Dr. Baird and others—out in strong foree.

‘Decem. 1810. Ice rather weak. 10th Jany. 1811. Ice weak; Rev. J. Thomson, Rev. J. Muir, and Dick, against Messrs. Linning, Thos. Trotter, and M’George. The latter gained—first game 13-10; second 13-3.’

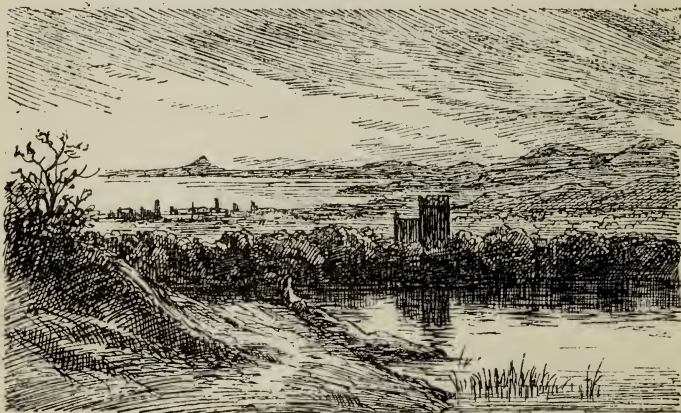
In the following year Principal Baird, after a keen competition, carried off the medal of the club.

Mr. Thomson, with that great kindness of heart and liberal-handed hospitality which ever distinguished him, kept open house at the manse on these crisp, frosty days, so conducive to the sharpening of a healthy appetite. Many a convivial evening was thus spent, after the bonspiel was over, in song and jest, and recalling the incidents of the day—how the skips ‘chipped the winner’ past a half guard; the grand ‘inwick’ of another, which brought his stone in to the ‘tee’ past all the ‘guards’; or the

splendid 'drive' of the third player, which 'cleared the ice' for his skip's 'fine draw' at the finish, to the very 'pat lid.'

And though the clerical friends, with the portly figure and jolly round face of Principal Baird at their head, must have often found the manse a 'very haven of rest' after a hard day's sweeping, and throwing, and shouting on the ice, and have had their own share of the creature comforts its table afforded, the kindly old face of Farmer Scott, with the blacksmith and the mason from the village, were made equally welcome; for it is one of the distinctive features of this fine old Scotch game that it brings together on equal terms of friendship men of different ranks and classes—

'There laird and cotter hand in hand
Strive wi' guid will to reach the tee;
Each then forgets his rank and state,
Nane there but friends and brithers be.'



DUDDINGSTON LOCH AND KIRK

CHAPTER IV

1813—1833

Marriage with Mrs. Dalrymple of Fordel—The Manse Visitors—*Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*—Turner and Scott—Rossetti—William Bell Scott—Ruskin—Anecdotes—Visits to London—Voyage with Dr. Chalmers—Characteristics—The Duke of Buccleuch's Order—Public Exhibitions in Edinburgh—Thomson's Influence—The Scottish School—Horatio Macculloch—Robert Scott Lauder—Marriage of Isabella Thomson.



R. THOMSON, after several years of widowhood, took to himself a second wife in the person of Frances Ingram Spence, the widow of Mr. Martin Dalrymple, of Fordel and Cleland. The marriage took place on 6th December 1813, and the circumstances under which it was brought about were of a somewhat romantic character. They are briefly as follows:—

Mrs. Dalrymple, happening to call at the shop of a picture-dealer during a visit to Edinburgh, was much struck by a painting of the Falls of Foyers. The execution was so novel and effective that, as she afterwards said, 'she was quite inspired by its feeling and picturesque beauty.' Herself an artist of no mean pretensions, she inquired the artist's name, and was surprised to find it was Thomson of Duddingston. She had before seen specimens of his work, but never anything that so thoroughly realised her ideal in

landscape. From that moment Mrs. Dalrymple longed to become acquainted with the man who could conceive and paint so fine a picture. She had soon an opportunity of gratifying her wish, being shortly afterwards introduced by one of her relatives to the minister. Before being aware of Mrs. Dalrymple's sentiments towards him, it is said that Mr. Thomson, the moment he saw her, and entered into conversation, felt '*that* woman must be my wife; she is the only being that I have seen for years with whom I could deeply sympathise.' Only one result could follow.

They were shortly afterwards married, and their affection for each other throughout life has been described as 'more like the warm, buoyant, innocent love of childhood than the staid, sober, stereotyped friendship of their advancing years.'

Mrs. Thomson's intense love for music and painting harmonised so well with all her husband's tastes and habits, that they spent much of their time in each other's society. Once she was asked by a friend how it came about that she, who was so rich, could ever have thought of marrying a minister. 'Oh,' she said, 'it is very easy to explain *that*; we just *drew* together!'

Mr. Thomson was himself a performer on the flute and violin of considerable excellence. Those who had heard his performances on either of these instruments seemed not readily to forget them. On one occasion, when he and Scott were being entertained by Lord Chief Commissioner Adam, at Blair-Adam, with a select company of friends, Scott records that 'we had wine and wassail and John Thomson's delightful flute to help us through the evening.'

Though not by any means a leader in conversation, but rather inclined as of old to act the part of the good listener, the minister

succeeded, with the able assistance of his wife, in throwing an attractive charm round their fireside circle, which added many friends, and made the manse at Duddingston an envied resort. 'Every one,' we are told in a little memoir by his niece, Miss Isabella R. Thomson—'Every one was delighted with the genuine simplicity of his manners, as well as with the depth and accuracy of his views on all subjects, for he was not only an arduous student during early youth, but his manhood steadily kept pace with the science and thought of the day.' In evidence of this statement it is worthy of note that Thomson was a writer as well as a painter, and as a contributor to some of the early numbers of the *Edinburgh Review* of several articles on physical science, particularly on optics, which were much admired for their manly vigour and clearness of thought, he exemplified what is seldom found combined in one and the same person—a love for science and art.

As an amateur violinist Thomson had few equals. His violin performances, it is said, were remarkable for their vigour of feeling and expression. 'We can never,' says one, 'forget the impression made upon us by a favourite air played by him on the violin, called the Dead March of the Mackenzies, accompanied by his son Frank on the violincello.' He played strathspeys, laments, Irish jigs, and Highland marches splendidly; indeed, had he not been a distinguished painter, he would have been equally well known to the world as a most skilful and soul-inspiring musician.

Music found a congenial home in the manse, and drew within its walls many a delightful company, at a time when public concerts were neither so plentiful nor so cheap as they now are. Mrs. Thomson was indeed quite an enthusiast, and did much to stimulate a taste for music in the parish. She had a large class for

the cultivation of sacred music, which met in the manse not unfrequently twice a week, and was conducted by herself, and at which John Wilson, the celebrated singer of Scottish songs, used to assist. He was a young man at the time, and frequently officiated for the precentor in the church, but so impressed was Mr. Thomson with his talents, that he predicted he would rise to excellence—a prediction afterwards fully verified.

Shortly after the marriage the manse was considerably enlarged, by an addition to the east side, including a large drawing-room and bedrooms above, in order to meet its growing social requirements.

With music and painting in company, the guests and visitors at the manse were numerous and brilliant. The house, indeed, was frequented to an extent that would hardly be credited.

Thomson's reputation as an artist was now thoroughly established, and while many works from his easel were still freely gifted to friends, orders for pictures poured in upon him from all quarters, and we have been told on good authority that between 1820 and 1830 he was in receipt of fully £1800 a year from this source—and that was considered a very wonderful thing in those days.

It was in the August of 1817 that Sir David Wilkie, then at the height of his popularity, paid a visit to Scotland. Being desirous of making a tour of the country, in order to become better acquainted with its scenery, only then beginning to be appreciated, he came down to Edinburgh. He had evidently no previous personal acquaintance with Mr. Thomson, but acting on the advice of several Edinburgh friends, and among others Mr. John Clerk of Eldin, he paid a visit to Duddingston manse with the view of asking the minister to accompany him to the Highlands. In a letter to his sister, narrating the circumstance, Sir David mentions

that, 'on going to Duddingston, however, Mr. Thomson was away from home, and his wife (who is a very fine woman) told me she doubted whether he could go, as his Sacrament is just coming on; otherwise I believe that not only would he have gone, but that Mrs. Thomson, who is also a great enthusiast, would have accompanied us one or two of the stages. I accordingly left Edinburgh on Tuesday last without a companion, but with plenty of letters of introduction.'

A tour in the West Highlands in those days was not the easy-going business we now find it; some parts of the country, indeed, were practically inaccessible, and in the company of such a companion as Thomson, who knew the ground well, Sir David's J 'aunt, which was made at the instigation of Sir Walter Scott, would have had its pleasure immensely enhanced. The prominent features of our Scottish scenery were then little known; but what Sir Walter Scott did for Scotland in word-painting Thomson did with his brush. His passion for his art grew with years, and 'he searched the country (says Alexander Smith) for subjects for his easel with greater ardour, one almost fears, than he showed in searching the Scriptures for texts for his sermons!'

It was in 1818 that Thomson and Turner came first into contact. In that year a proposal was made to publish a large work to be called *The Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, illustrating the chief picturesque features of the country—its castles, its churches, abbeys, woods, and hills. Leading artists of the day were to be employed to furnish the plates, and Sir Walter Scott undertook to write the descriptive letterpress. To John Thomson and J. M. W. Turner the publishers naturally looked as the two recognised exponents of landscape art. Both were engaged, and the latter came

down to Scotland and made a tour of the country, sketch-book in hand, in 1822. He made a number of drawings of places of interest, chiefly in the Lothians, as Borthwick and Crichton Castles, Tantallon, Dunbar, Craigmillar, Linlithgow Palace, the Bass Rock, etc., and visited these in company with Scott and Thomson. Turner never seemed, however, to get into Scott's favour. The great novelist had a keen enjoyment of the things in Nature, which were the raw material, so to speak, of Turner's art. He delighted in landscape, and no artist ever had a stronger liking for ancient or romantic buildings, especially when their interest was enhanced by historical or legendary associations. Yet, notwithstanding what was up to this point a community of tastes, we are told by Turner's biographer, 'Sir Walter could not really enter into the mind of Turner, because, whilst delighting in Nature, he had no understanding of graphic art.' We are inclined to believe that it was more a personal antipathy to Turner's habits and manner that made Scott indicate a strong preference for Thomson, even as a painter. He only acquiesced in Turner supplying so many of the illustrations for the work, as he himself said, 'because he was all the fashion.' As it ultimately happened, when the book made its appearance in 1826, an equal number of the illustrations were executed by Turner and Thomson, and it is safe to say that for power of delineation, accuracy of drawing and finish, Thomson's are not surpassed by any within its pages.

Scott declined any pecuniary recompense for this publication, but afterwards, when its success was secured, he accepted from the proprietors some of the beautiful drawings by Turner, Thomson, and others.

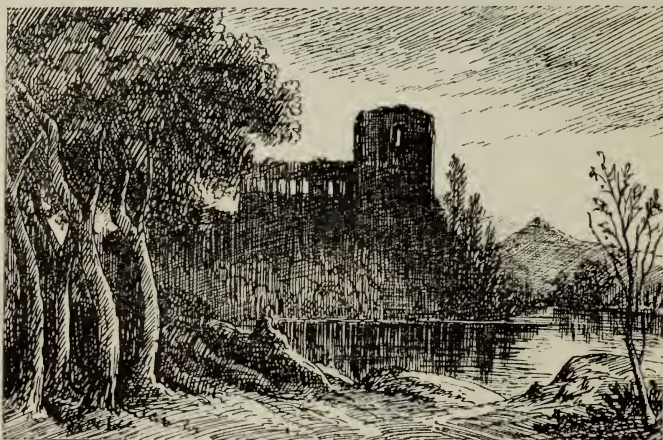
During Turner's sojourn in Scotland, he was a frequent guest at

the manse of Duddingston, and William Bell Scott, then only 'a beginner of twenty or so,' tells us in his *Autobiographical Notes*, in his own simple way, some reminiscences not altogether complimentary to Turner, and of his meeting him at dinner there. 'Thomson,' he says, 'had unbounded admiration of Turner's art; at the same time he laughed good-humouredly at the man, and at the anecdotes then current, to which he added others from his own intercourse.' Cockneyism was at the time the prevailing subject of Edinburgh ridicule, not in literature merely, but in social life, and as an indication of the dwarfed cultivation and style of talk of the great adept, he tells how Thomson was one day examining with much admiration a drawing by Turner. It was a view of a distant river, with a greyhound at full speed after a hare in the foreground. 'Ah,' said Turner, noticing Thomson's close scrutiny of the picture, 'I see you want to know why I have introduced that 'are. It's a bit of sentiment, sir! For that is the spot where 'Arold 'Arefoot fell, and you see I have made an 'ound a-chasing an 'are!' Was ever a joke more contemptible? It is quite as excruciating as any surgical operation Sydney Smith could have conceived or performed on the obtuse skull of the dullest Scotsman!

Some years afterward this story happened to be repeated in a company of friends among whom were D. G. Rossetti, John Ruskin, and William Bell Scott. Scott and Ruskin did not agree on many points, particularly in their estimate of Turner, and Scott told the story with all the gusto he could command as a good-humoured reprisal for what he called 'Ruskin's supercilious pretence' and inflated notions of Turner's abilities, following it up with the remark that 'the evidence of the personality and talk of a man was in most cases conclusive as to the character of his works.' Rossetti laughed,

and asked if Turner really talked in that way, and how he managed to get over that sort of thing; but Ruskin's countenance fell, and the thundercloud on his brow indexed the passion within, or as Scott himself archly said—'the poisonous expression on his face was a study!'

Ruskin has undoubtedly written much true criticism of his hero; very beautiful, and very instructive. Let us not undervalue so



BRAHAN CASTLE

priceless a gift to the literature of Art. His hero-worship was no affectation, but a loving, spontaneous admiration, which has impelled him in talk as in his writings to frequent extravagance, or as W. Bell Scott put it, 'to find out qualities no one else could see, and to contradict or ignore those evident to every one else.'

At the particular meeting referred to in Duddingston manse there was a large party at dinner. Turner, who was residing in the city, was brought out in the carriage of a friend, who, however, left soon after dinner, and so the great artist was thrown on the

indulgence of another friend to frank him home. Poor Turner, he never could do justice to himself!

Though in many respects Thomson and Turner had tastes in common, their moral natures were most dissimilar. Both were idealists in Art; both were absorbed in the study of the beautiful; both felt the power of colour and form impelling them to work and think. But while the one was selfish, ill-natured, and jealous to the last degree, the other was open, candid, generous, and unsuspicious.

On the subject of Art Turner's experience was doubtless the more extensive of the two. He had greater opportunities for foreign travel; he had seen more of the world, and intercourse with foreign artists had widened the scope of his art knowledge. As such he was an undoubted authority in his own province, and Thomson yielded him that deference which was unquestionably his due.

On one occasion Turner spent several days with the minister at the manse, and some amusing reminiscences of the visit remain. It was a universal belief in those days that the old masters had their secrets, so called; and in one of the biographies of Turner, we find him asking Thomson if he had yet found Titian's secret. It appeared as if Turner himself had what he considered valuable secrets, which he jealously guarded, allowing no one to see him paint or even to sketch if he could prevent it. He was always living in an atmosphere of mystery. One day Thomson and 'Grecian' Williams set out with him on an excursion to Craigmillar Castle, in the immediate vicinity. They went to make sketches of the ruin; but the London artist, when in the neighbourhood of his subject, avoided their company, edging away by himself and leaving the two to work together. He made several sketches of the Castle

from different points of view, in pencil, but showed what he had done to no one. On their return to the manse in the evening, Turner happening to lay down his sketch-book on the lobby table, the minister's wife, curious to see the great artist's work, ran off with the book. Turner, however, gave chase, and took it from her before she had time to look at it, nor did any one see anything he did whilst he remained at the manse.

On the other hand, Thomson, in the matter of Art, was free from the narrow jealousy of spirit frequently to be found among professional artists. The fact that in his modesty he always looked upon himself as an amateur no doubt contributed largely to this feeling. Of Turner he used to speak in the most enthusiastic terms—long before Ruskin, his great expositor, was born—as the greatest landscape painter that the world had yet produced. We much fear the same generosity was not evinced on the other side. Whether Turner looked upon Thomson as *merely* an amateur we cannot say. 'For amateurs as a class, it is said, he cherished feelings of unconquerable aversion'; but we are inclined to suspect that for Thomson, at least, he secretly cherished that respect which jealous natures are not frank enough to admit.

During his visit the minister endeavoured in vain to find out what his friend thought of his pictures. One day when he had taken him into the studio to show him several of these, newly framed and ready to be sent off for exhibition, Turner, after looking at them somewhat critically for some time, at last called out rather ungraciously, 'Ah, Thomson! you beat me hollow—in frames!' Even to a direct question as to what he thought of *that* picture, pointing to a particularly fine one on the easel, he made no response. It was only when leaving the room, as his eye fell on a small sketch



hanging on the wall, that he stopped and exclaimed, 'The man who did *that* could paint!'

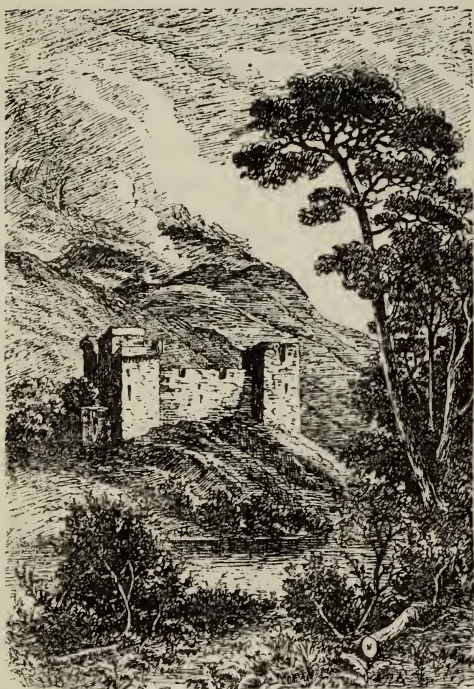
The only other complimentary remark Turner seems to have made was in reference to the Loch, which he did in this wise, as he drove off from the manse door: 'By God, though, I envy you that piece of water!' Well he might: it was Thomson's living model.

Very little indeed did Thomson or any one else get out of this strange mortal.

Whatever Turner was in Art, he was essentially coarse and vulgar in speech. It was his way to make a joke—often a rough one—out of a left-handed compliment, as on one occasion at Duddingston, when Sir Francis Grant and Mr. Horsman, M.P., were present. Grant, who then resided in Regent's Park, near to the Zoological Gardens, asked the great painter courteously to come and dine with him on his return to London. 'I'll be very glad,' said Turner jocosely, 'I often go to see the wild beasts fed!'

A propos of this is an amusing reminiscence by W. L. Leitch, a clever artist of the old school, well acquainted with both men. Turner, said Leitch, was very fond of painting the Nor' Loch at the base of the Castle Rock of Edinburgh, and when there used to like to run and get his dinner with Mr. Thomson at Duddingston, and spoke of it as 'making the little distance' between the manse and the loch. He did this very frequently, and always with great pleasure. One day Mr. Thomson said to him, 'Turner, I mean to have a dinner with you in Queen Anne Street when I come up to London. I shall be there next month.' Turner at once responded, 'But it is very uncertain whether I shall be there.' Thomson said, 'Oh, but you must be there; I'll wait till you are.' With a shrug of his shoulder Turner suggested, 'You had much better get your

dinner at your own hotel.' Mr. Thomson, however, determined to have it out with him, but with what Mr. Leitch calls 'the questionable taste not uncommon at that period,' said, 'But I want to make the little distance between my hotel and your house.' 'You will



OLD HAILES CASTLE

get your dinner more comfortably at any place than at my house,' pleaded Turner; 'dine at your own hotel.' But the other answered stolidly, 'I want to dine with you, Turner.' 'Well, come to my house, then, if you like,' said he at last, 'but dine before you come!' When Thomson arrived in London he went to Queen Anne Street, and made Turner fix a day for this too-much-talked-of dinner. Before the day arrived, however, Thomson met Rogers, who told him that Sir Walter Scott was in town, and that he and Sir Walter

and some friends were going to dine at Richmond, and invited him to join the party. 'But I can't!' replied Thomson, 'I am going to dine with Turner.' 'With Turner!' cried Rogers, 'you will get a very bad dinner there!' Then they pressed him to go to Richmond with them, and invited Turner to go too. When Thomson conveyed the

message, ‘Turner said, ‘But I have bought the leg of mutton!’ ‘Never mind the leg of mutton,’ replied Thomson; ‘take it with you and stick it into the hand of the first poor person you meet.’

‘Not such a born fool!’ exclaimed Turner.

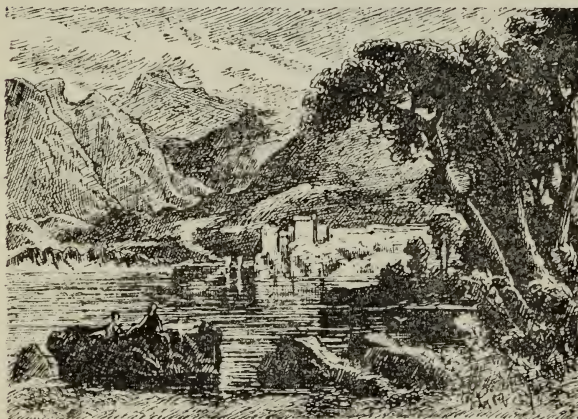
Thomson was quite a different character. He had little self-esteem, or only sufficient to be called self-respect; but he was the last man to attempt to hurt the feelings of others. He would frankly talk of the excellences and faults of his own works with the honest freedom that he evinced in criticising the works of his contemporaries or of the old masters. When others could see no faults in his pictures he would honestly point them out, and regret their existence. The love of truth coloured every phase of his character.

That he was quite a match for Turner in repartee is well illustrated by the story of their meeting in the London Gallery, probably in the year 1827. Thomson was standing in the Gallery surrounded by a number of friends, when Turner espied him, and with his usual roughness of manner and vulgar familiarity advanced to shake hands, exclaiming at the same time, in a kind of Anglicised Scotch, ‘Weel, Thomson, hoo’s the guidwife and weans?’ Thomson, not at all put out, replied in the native Doric, ‘Brawly, man, and hoo are ye *yersel*, *frien*?’ Amid the shout of laughter which followed this sally at his solitary condition, poor Turner was quite upset, and slunk off to another part of the room.

The difference in character of the two men was very marked in their human sympathies. Turner seems to have had little or no regard for the welfare or feelings of others, while of the other it was a remarkably true saying of his wife, that ‘it was not safe to trust John with money in his pocket’; he would give it away so readily. One day, when out walking together, they were met by a poor man,

who humbly asked them for a copper. Turner frowned, and roughly ordered the man about his business, but Thomson's feelings were roused by this unnecessary harshness, and making the excuse that he had a word to say to the beggar, he turned back, and, with a few kindly words, slipped a half-crown into his hand.

The roughness of manner shown by Turner on his first visit to Scotland seems to have made a bad impression on many besides



CASTLE URQUHART

Thomson. We find Sir Walter Scott referring to it many years after—in 1831 — when Cadell's edition of the *Waverley Novels* was being projected with illustrations by Turner. To tell the truth, Scott would have infinitely preferred had

his publishers selected Thomson's pencil rather than Turner's for this particular edition; but, yielding to their urgent representations, he at length acquiesced in the selection of Turner, because, as they said, he was better known in London than Thomson. He accordingly mentions in his *Journal* after the arrangement was concluded: 'I have written to the Man of Art inviting him to come to Abbotsford to take the necessary drawings, and offering to transport him to the places where he is to exercise his pencil, though,' says he in addition, 'if I remember, *he is not very agreeable.*'

That there was some similarity in their art-work has been very generally admitted by critics, and indeed some have gone so far as to discover a great deal of resemblance in their style, and have described Thomson as the 'Scottish Turner.' We are not inclined to homologate this entirely, for in many respects Thomson's individuality was such as to preclude him ever being an imitator of any one, however excellent; but we have a rather remarkable illustration of the estimation in which his work may be placed when standing upon its own merits. Sir James D. Linton, President of the Royal Institution, London, in a speech delivered in Aberdeen (2nd July 1890), referring to what Scotland had achieved in the past in the world of Art, put Thomson of Duddingston in the front rank of British artists; and speaking of the estimation in which his work is still held, he mentioned that one of his pictures, which was sold in Edinburgh a few years ago, reached London, but the picture was so remarkably fine, that most of the experts there said, 'It is not a Thomson; it is a Turner'; and at Messrs. Christie and Manson's rooms it was actually sold as the work of the English artist! 'Can there be,' said Sir James, 'a higher compliment to a painter than that his work should be taken for the work of a man I call the Shakespeare of Art?'

Though Thomson was not insensible to the advantages which wealth and rank could purchase, in the pursuit of Art we find him invariably rising above the sordid desire for recompense for his work. This motive, which not unfrequently is found strongly developed in painters of high attainment, had little or no weight with him. Being practically independent of any income he might derive from his brush, he was happily rid of the temptation to eke out his art by what are vulgarly called 'pot-boilers.' He sought

after Nature for the sake of Art, and the pleasure and satisfaction its pursuit afforded him. It is doubtless true that money sweetens labour, and the pleasure of painting was not lessened but rather enhanced, by the feeling that his friends desired not merely to be possessed of his work, but to pay a good price for what they got. Still the motive for work and the reward for work done are different considerations in the mind of the true artist. Thomson was something more than a mere painter of pictures to adorn the parlours of those who could afford to buy them. He was a student of Nature first, the artist next, and last and least of all the merchant; indeed, the latter function he performed, we fear, very indifferently. We have a good illustration of this feature of his character in the following letter addressed to North Dalrymple, Esq., afterwards ninth Earl of Stair, and father of the present Earl, who was then residing at Campie, near Musselburgh.

DUDDINGSTON, *Sunday, 26 September 1830.*

MY DEAR MR. DALRYMPLE,

If I read your note aright it is Friday 6th you mean for us to have the pleasure of waiting on you. I believe the 6th falls on Wednesday, and, of course, the following Friday is the 8th. We are quite at your disposal either of these days, but till we hear again shall be puzzled which of them you wish us to come—*Deo Volente*. . . .

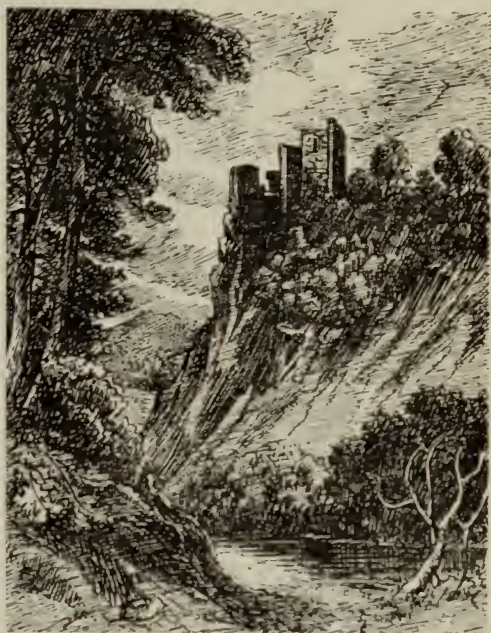
The picture sent to you lately is not, strictly speaking, a *view*. I seldom do paint views; but it was composed from materials immediately in the neighbourhood of Loch Leven, with a distant peep of an old tower called Burleigh. Since you do insist on my naming the filthy thing called a price, I have generally had something about ten guineas for such productions. Have you taken it out of the frame? The sacrifice of what is hid up is of no great consequence; but, should you desire an enlargement by several inches, you have it in your power. I remain, my dear Mr. Dalrymple, yours with great regard,

J. THOMSON.

No considerations of 'price' were allowed to influence his enthusiasm—or rather, shall we say, his creative inspiration?—as an artist. 'The true landscapist,' it has been well said, 'is not only a seer; he is a maker, a builder, a poet; but, he makes and builds up only in conformity with the laws of the material universe, into which he sees a few handbreadths deeper than his fellow-mortals, and hence his works become almost as suggestive and spirit-stirring as Nature herself.' If the reproduction of Nature, even if it be only in so ephemeral a material as a piece of rough canvas or paper, is of man's work the nearest in resemblance to the work of creation, Thomson undoubtedly experienced, in the de-

light such creations gave him, his highest recompence, and we are almost tempted, but with reverence, to add of his work, 'and behold it was very good.' The 'price' with him was a 'filthy thing,' or at least of only secondary importance, and not to be put in comparison with the higher motive, which teaches that

'Art gifts with soul all matter that it touches.'



INNERWICK CASTLE

Sir Walter Scott, who sometimes looked at Art from a more matter-of-fact point of view, in which the pecuniary recompence was, in his estimation, a not unimportant element, soundly rated Thomson on one occasion upon this indifference of his to money matters. It occurs in an entry in his *Journal*, under date 22nd May 1831, as follows: 'I have a letter from my friend John Thomson of Duddingston. I had transmitted to him an order from the Duke of Buccleuch for his best picture at his best price, leaving the choice of the subject and everything else to himself. He (Thomson) expresses the wish to do at an *ordinary* price a picture of a *common* size. The declining to put himself forward will, I fear, be thought like shrinking from his own reputation, which nobody has less need to do. The Duke may wish a *large* picture for a large price for furnishing a large apartment, and the artist should not shrink from it. I have written him my opinion. The feeling is no doubt an amiable though a false one. He is modest in proportion to his talents. But what brother of the finer arts ever approached excellence so as to please himself?'

Thomson in this case complied with Scott's wishes, and painted for the Duke the picture of Ravensheugh Castle, which now adorns the dining-room at Bowhill, his Grace's Selkirkshire seat. It is a large canvas, five feet three inches by three feet and a half, very similar in composition as well as in tone and feeling to the same subject in the Scottish National Gallery.

Scott's opinion of his friend as an artist was very pronounced, and there can be little doubt that his influence with the Duke brought him more than this one commission. Five or six years later he painted the large picture—seven feet by three feet and a half—of 'Edinburgh from Inverleith House,' for his Grace, which is also in

the same spacious apartment, for, said Scott, 'he is not only the best landscape painter of his age and country, but one of the warmest-hearted men living, with a keen and unaffected feeling of poetry' in his composition.

When these words were penned Thomson had achieved some of his greatest successes as a painter, and his fame stood deservedly high in the Art world. An evidence of his remarkable industry is to be found in the large number of his public exhibits alone, and these were certainly a poor index of what must have passed from his hands altogether. During the seven years previous to 1831 he exhibited at the Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Edinburgh no less than fifty pictures, many of them large and important works.

In 1826 the Annual Exhibition, which before that date had been held in the house of Sir Henry Raeburn in York Place, was held for the first time in the rooms of the Royal Institution on the Mound, and proved to be a decided advance upon previous efforts. Here is how his friend Sir Walter speaks of it in his *Journal*:—

'Feby. 9th.—I visited the Exhibition on my way home from Court. The new rooms are most splendid, and there are several good pictures. The Institution has subsisted but five years, and it is astonishing how much superior the worst of the present collection are to the tea-board-looking things which first appeared. John Thomson of Duddingston has far the finest picture in the Exhibition of a large size; subject, Dunluce—a ruinous castle of the Antrim family near the Giant's Causeway, with one of those terrible seas and skies which only Thomson can paint.'

Again, in 1828, Scott, referring in his *Journal* to the Academy, says:—

'9 Feby.—As I came home from the Court I stepped into the Exhibition.

It makes a very good show. I particularly distinguished John Thomson's picture of Turnberry Castle, which is of first-rate excellence.'

Thomson's influence, both personal and artistic, was undoubtedly of great service at this time in the formation of the Scottish School of Art. By the young men of the Academy his counsel and advice were eagerly sought after, and were as freely given. No one sought help from him in vain, for his house and hand were ever open to all who really wanted his assistance. To the younger men especially he was ever generous and helpful. His position and influence gave him many opportunities of encouraging struggling merit, and that in a truly friendly and unostentatious way.

Among those who may be named as coming under Thomson's personal influence, and who received great kindness at his hands, may be mentioned Daniel Macnee, afterwards 'Sir Daniel,' and President of the Academy, William Bell Scott, Horatio Macculloch, the brothers James Eckford Lauder and Robert Scott Lauder, David Scott, and many others, who in after years acknowledged their obligations.

William Bell Scott tells us in his autobiography that about the year 1826 he was striving to overcome the difficulties of etching and engraving, and being desirous of showing Thomson that he had to some extent at least mastered these arts, and was able to undertake the reproduction in black and white of a large landscape, he borrowed from him a picture called the 'Martyrs' Tombs,' being graves of Covenanters in the wild mountain region of Galloway. This picture by Thomson (whom he designates 'the clerical amateur who had at once gone ahead of all the Scottish professors') had made a profound sensation. It was a fine picture, and Scott felt proud to be allowed to engrave it. 'When my engraving of it was finished,' says Bell Scott, 'I took the proof to Professor Wilson, and

asked if I might place a dedication to him under it.' The request was readily granted; but it must be admitted, for the credit of the original, that Scott's reproduction of it in black and white cannot be said to be a success.

Horatio Macculloch, whose early training and practice was in the West, and whose vigour of style, truthfulness of colouring, and carefulness in detail mark him out as a leader in Scottish landscape, is frequently compared with Thomson. But while Macculloch admired the works of Thomson, and felt spurred on to emulation by his example, his ideas of Art were totally different. He had, in fact, formed his style, and his pictures had been much admired, before he met Thomson. Thomson showed him marked attention on his coming to Edinburgh, was much charmed with his work, and frequently invited him to meet at his hospitable board those men of talent or position by whom he was generally surrounded; but it is said that no assistance in his art progress was given or expected.

Perhaps over none of the young men of the first quarter of the century was Thomson's influence more appreciably felt than over the character of Robert Scott Lauder, R.S.A., and his brother Eckford.

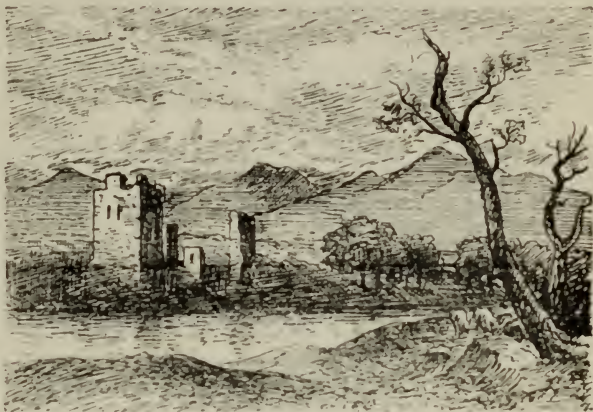
Thomson doubtless sympathised much with young Scott Lauder in his early aspirations for Art, with parental and other difficulties to be surmounted. Had he not himself when a youth had parental influence biassing his mind against his early predilections, and forcing him into the ministry? But while he had accepted the latter as his profession, he had still retained his love for Art, and had kept up the practice of it with wonderful perseverance. It was clear to every one that Art to him was more than the ministry. Yet the two were, in a measure, not incompatible, for Art and Literature are twin sisters. But poor Lauder's lot was different.

After receiving a good commercial education at the High School of Edinburgh, he was placed in the counting-house of his father's tannery at Silvermills, without the power of choice, his views on the matter of a profession being simply ignored, and the parental will made to dominate any predilection for 'such nonsense as painting.' The result was as might have been expected. Young Lauder neglected the figures of arithmetic in the tannery for those of Michael Angelo and the great masters. This annoyed and disgusted his disappointed parent, who endeavoured first by gentle remonstrance, and afterwards by overbearing opposition, to thwart and subdue his son's art inclinations. Father and son were equally stubborn, and if the former at length gave way, it was in silent contempt or sorrowful protest. It is no doubt hard for a parent to have his prudential and honourable designs set at naught and rendered futile by the wilfulness and caprice of inexperienced youth, but it is also hard to have one's career mechanically fixed irrespective of suitability or inclination. In the end, then, and in spite of the axiom that 'there is nothing like leather,' young Lauder turned his back upon tan-pits and leather, ledgers and cash, and in so doing most probably lost his chance of eventually dying a wealthy man with a well-lined purse; but his forsaking of the tan-pits of Silvermills was a fortunate thing for Scottish Art.

He early made the acquaintance of the minister of Duddingston, who ever evinced for him the warmest friendship, and exercised over his art not a little influence, particularly in the formation of his style in regard to chiaroscuro and form. But Lauder not only found the minister sympathetic, and his instruction profitable; he had other attractions to draw him to the manse, in the person of the minister's daughter, for whom he had formed an ardent attachment, and she for him; and where love reigns, Art may not presume to rule.

The visits, we may thus be sure, would be both frequent and long. On one occasion Lauder brought with him a difficult canvas over which he had been working for some time, but with not altogether satisfactory results, in order to get some suggestions from Mr. Thomson about it. That he had another object in view in his visit was evident from the scrupulous care with which he was attired; for, as a

relative once told us, 'he was a great dandy in his youth.' Thomson examined the canvas carefully, and then handed it back with a laughing twinkle in his eye, saying, 'I am afraid, Robert, Nature



A BORDER KEEP

does not reveal her secrets to dandies in such fine clothes!'

Robert Scott Lauder and Miss Isabella Thomson were married at the manse on 10th September 1833, and in her company he proceeded to Italy, where he studied for four or five years, after which he settled down in London, gaining well-merited distinction as the painter of the 'Trial of Effie Deans' and 'Christ Teaching Humility,'—works which will ever rank him among our most eminent Scottish artists.

Thomson's kindness to him, it is said, he never forgot to his latest day, but gratefully acknowledged among the happiest and most fondly cherished experiences of a brilliant and honourable career.

CHAPTER V

A Busy Life—Parish Gossip—Anecdotes—The Lame Minister—‘A bonnie wee bit of sky’—The ‘Edinburgh’ Retreat—Pulpit Ministrations—Louis Cauvin’s Device—Thomson on ‘Moderation’—Doctrine and Practice—Portobello Church—Moderates and Evangelicals—Mrs. Thomson’s Music Lessons—Stories of John Richardson the Beadle.



THE multifarious round of occupations into which Thomson’s life was divided naturally enough created among neighbours and parishioners some little speculation as to how he managed to get through it all, and many were even uncharitable enough to insinuate that it was only done at the expense of his ministerial duties.

All this painting, violin playing, entertaining of company, sketching expeditions, etc., they said, could not but interfere with these; and some ludicrous and even incredible stories were current which may be taken for what they are worth. We repeat one or two of them as specimens of the then current gossip of the district. As we have already said, Mr. Thomson appears to have faithfully discharged his duties as a parish minister both in visiting and preaching; and if the latter function was sometimes delegated to probationers in his absence, he was, upon the whole, wonderfully regular. Like other ministers he had his holiday seasons, and these were always fully taken advantage of for sketching tours.

A rather apocryphal story is told of one of the probationers

who occasionally took his place. He was a lame man, or rather a man with a wooden leg, who resided in Edinburgh. On the Sabbath morning referred to it was very stormy when he started from the City, intending to walk to Duddingston through the King's Park, past the base of Samson's Ribs, and over the 'Windy Gowl.' At that time there was no smooth carriage-way as there is now, and the footpath was rough and uncertain, meandering among the rocks and broken ground in a very irregular manner. Being overtaken by the force of the gale, the poor man stumbled and fell among the rocks in the 'Windy Gowl,' and was unfortunate enough to break his leg—luckily only his wooden one—so as to be quite unable to proceed further. The last bell had been rung, and there being no appearance of the expected minister at the kirk, one or two of the elders set out to meet him, when they discovered him scrambling among the rocks with his broken stump. They at once carried him to the church and set him in the pulpit in safety! Some may think that it would be well if 'lame' ministers could be as easily removed *from* the pulpit!

But it was not only hinted that the minister absented himself for sketching expeditions, he also got the credit of sometimes working at his easel on Sundays. On one occasion, as the story goes, the first, the second, and the third bells had rung out. Thomson was deeply engrossed in a captivating canvas, and the beadle, old John Richardson, came to the door to remind him that the time was up, and the congregation waiting. 'Do ye no ken, sir, that the bells are dune ringing, an' the folk are a' in the kirk?' said John; but so intent was he realising an effect in the picture before him, he called out: 'Oh, John! just go and ring the bell for other five minutes till I get in this bonnie wee bit of sky!'

Again, one day when in the middle of his sermon a violent thunderstorm of extraordinary grandeur broke over the church, Thomson, it is said, hurriedly brought the service to a close, ran to his studio, and at once began to paint the effects as they flashed before him—the rolling clouds, the vivid lightning, and the lurid light.

After the erection of the octagonal tower at the Loch-side by the Duddingston Curling Club in 1825, which is still standing, Mr. Thomson occasionally made the upper story of it his studio, and a most suitable one it must have been, commanding, as it does, a lovely prospect of hill and loch. Here he found a safe retreat when he wished to be free from the bustle of the house or intrusive visitors. But tittle-tattle had it that he was often to be found there when he was supposed, or was represented to be, at Edinburgh; and so among some of the villagers the curling-house came jocularly to be called ‘Edinburgh’!

These and other stories of a similar kind were likely enough in the circumstances to be circulated, and even find credence among a rural population, some of them perhaps not over friendly to what they considered the hobbies of their minister. A friend to whom they were narrated—the son of one of Mr. Thomson’s elders—who, when he was a lad, was a good deal about the manse in those days as a playmate of the minister’s sons, informed us they were utterly untrue, and angrily asserted with some emphasis that the person who made such cruel statements ought to be dipped in the Loch!

In regard to Mr. Thomson’s pulpit ministrations different views have been expressed. The Rev. Hew Scott, author of the *Fasti Ecclesiæ Scoticanæ*, describes him as ‘a sensible, rather than a



View of the Great Lakes from the
Rocky Mountain of the Great Lakes

popular preacher.' At a time when long sermons were more common than they are now, the minister of Duddingston does not appear to have erred on this score. With a shrewd suspicion of his people's weakness for short ones, he generally humoured them accordingly.

From the foresaid friend we learn that he would send one of his boys to look out a sermon for him on the Sabbath morning, when a fresh one had not been prepared; and the boys, having a partiality for short discourses, carefully selected those having this desirable qualification, a few of which came to be known as favourites on that account!

One of Mr. Thomson's elders was Louis Cauvin, a celebrated French teacher in Edinburgh. He had retired from active life to spend the evening of his days at Woodlands, near to Duddingston Mill. Being a man of considerable culture, with a pretty intimate knowledge of Paris as it was before the great Revolution, he and the minister came to be on very intimate terms, and enjoyed many a social hour together; the artistic temperament of the one and the scholastic culture of the other forming between them a common bond of friendship.

Cauvin did not like long sermons, and when he thought the minister had gone beyond reasonable bounds, he had no hesitation in giving him the hint. Cauvin's seat was in the front gallery of the church, facing the pulpit. He wore one of those large, old-fashioned watches, with heavy chain and seals, commonly worn by substantial elderly gentlemen in those days, and when the sermon as he thought was getting a little 'dreigh,' he would lean himself forward on the book-board, take out his watch, and, hanging it over the front of the gallery, give it a gentle swing by the chain to attract

the preacher's attention, as much as to say, 'You have been long enough, time's up.' The artifice, we are told, generally had the desired effect!

Of the character of Mr. Thomson's preaching we should be inclined to say it was more of the moral, moderate type, than fervidly evangelical. Doctrine and precept formed a large part of the preaching of his time, unaccompanied by any stirring appeal to conscience and heart, and he appears to have been no exception to the general rule. Unfortunately few of his written discourses have survived the fate so largely attendant, we suspect, upon this class of literature; but we have one specimen before us which, in its style no less than its theme, may be taken as a fair example of both. It was evidently composed in 1810, and from the various markings upon it had done duty repeatedly down to 1828, and possibly even later. The text is taken from the Epistle to the Philippians, iv. 5: 'Let your moderation be known unto all men.' In a plain, sensible way, and without any attempt at dialectic eloquence, the duty of exercising 'that quiet and unassuming temper which prompts to love, conciliation, and peace' is strongly enjoined; the evils to society and the danger to our own happiness which follow the pursuit of an opposite course are clearly pointed out. 'Stiffly to adhere to our own fancies and humours, to refuse all compliance on the one hand, and all forbearance on the other, seems,' he says, 'contrary to any real desire for peace, and therefore must be contrary to Christian moderation.' To live peaceably with all men he conceives to be the chief end of Christian effort, for 'there will always be men in the world to foment the differences in it . . . to search out faults and disturb its quiet; these are the chief instruments in embittering the happiness of social and domestic life; . . . while the disgusting

passions of hatred, malice, pride, and arrogance are the great obstacles to our becoming truly in love with the divine virtue of charity, which covereth a multitude of faults. . . . By these, men are impelled not only to refuse all measures of conciliation, but to delight in still further incensing one another. In order to do justice to the claims of others we must learn to place no more than a just value on our own. If our breasts be filled with an overweening conceit of ourselves, of our own abilities, and our own way; if we think it beneath our dignity to alter or amend anything concerning ourselves—if we are ashamed to own a fault, even after we are inwardly sensible of it, then indeed there is little chance of our acting with uniform fairness and candour, and moderation. This indeed we can scarcely hope to do till we have truly subjected all selfish passions and learned to take a just view of our own private ends, and have learned such a command over ourselves as that we can oblige these private views at any time to yield to more weighty and generous considerations. This is surely no romantic, no unattainable height of human virtue. Like other virtues it has its various objects, and if there is any virtue which ensures its own reward, even in this world, and which not only imparts a delightful sense of inward approbation, but infallibly is attended with the admiration of our fellow-creatures, it is the virtue of candour and moderation.'

Modern divines would, we fear, look askance at this way of representing gospel truth, and doubt its power to mould the life of their hearers to its precepts.

But if Thomson's power as a preacher was not of the first order, he had at all events the happy reputation of exercising that charity which covereth a multitude of sins. 'Good words,' it is said, 'are worth much,' but good deeds are a splendid supplement. He is a

better preacher who can follow up the sermon by skilful toil for the glory of God and the good of his people. In this respect Thomson's practice outran his profession. Profoundly impressed with the importance of religion, he was tolerant of dogmas. His advice—and it was uniformly sound and judicious—was ever at the service of his parishioners, while his sympathy flowed out in more substantial aid when that was required. The price of many a picture found its way in the shape of bottles of wine and other comforts into the cottages of the sick and infirm, while seldom or never was a case of real distress turned from his door unaided.

In this connection we have a characteristic illustration in the case of the old woman—Betty Steele, a poor old body in the village—who came to the manse one day in sore distress over some grievous loss that had befallen her. After pouring out the torrent of her trouble into the patient ears of her minister, she wound up with the pious request, 'Eh, Mr. Thomson, would ye no pit up a bit prayer for me?' The minister, who evidently diagnosed the case as calling for more practical assistance than 'a bit prayer,' dived into the recesses of his breeches pocket for any stray coins that might happen to be there; and slipping five shillings into the old woman's hand, he whispered into her ear, 'Tak' that, Betty, my good woman; it's likely to do you more good than any prayers I'm able to make!'

Of the minister and the manse, indeed, the words of Goldsmith present us with a not inapt picture of the open-handed liberality which did not look too closely into every applicant's worthiness:

'His house was known to all the vagrant train,
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain;
Careless their merits, or their faults to scan,
His pity gave, ere charity began.'

Not often do we find Mr. Thomson's name identified either in Presbytery or General Assembly with ecclesiastical matters. Polemical discussion had for him no attractions. Even the agitation on the question of non-intrusion, important as it was, which during the last ten years of his life stirred the whole country, did not much affect him. He attended to his pastoral duties, preached the gospel to his people, and visited the sick and dying, filling up what spare time he had with his brush, but keeping himself clear as far as he could of church courts and public agitation.

When duty called, however, he did not shrink from taking his fair share of ecclesiastical business and responsibility. We find, for instance, that in February 1818 he took a very active and prominent part in assisting the inhabitants of Portobello in getting the sanction of the Edinburgh Presbytery to the erection of their chapel—built ten years previous—into a 'Chapel of Ease,' with an ordained minister. Hitherto it was only a chapel with a 'preacher,' under the authority of the Kirk Session of Duddingston. But the people of Portobello now desired to have a fully ordained pastor with a Kirk Session of their own, and petitioned the General Assembly accordingly. The matter had been up before the superior court of the Church in 1817, by whom it was referred to the local Presbytery. Mr. Thomson entered very heartily into the movement, though its object was to cut off a large portion of his parish from his supervision and control. He not only presented the petition of the people of Portobello, but gave his most hearty consent and support to the movement. It was granted, and shortly afterwards the 'preacher,' Mr. John Glen, was formally set apart by the Presbytery as the first fully ordained minister of the town.

For a considerable time parochial affairs were managed for the

two congregations by the Kirk Session of Duddingston, to which the Portobello congregation sent three representatives; but in 1834, by the passing of the Chapels of Ease Act by the General Assembly, the Portobello chapel was raised to the ecclesiastical status of a parish church, *quoad sacra*. By this arrangement Mr. Thomson and his Session were relieved of a considerable amount of supervision in regard to discipline, management of churchyard, and providing for the poor, which did not strictly pertain to Duddingston congregation. The Church of Scotland in the first part of the century was divided into two distinct and sharply defined sections. Holding practically the same doctrines so far as outward profession was concerned, and submitting to the same form of Church government, the Moderates and the Evangelicals were yet diametrically opposed in their methods and aims. The latter represented the zeal, the life, the aggressive spirit of religion, in seeking to send the gospel to the poor at home, as well as to the heathen abroad. The former were supposed to be indifferent as to these, if not practically hostile; looking upon foreign missions as 'romantic and visionary,' and 'highly dangerous to society.' Culture and the practice of letters they considered of more importance; and among the Moderate clergy of that period there were many notable men, distinguished for their culture, and as leaders in philosophy and science. Nor did their conservatism in regard to ecclesiastical matters prevent many of that party being thoroughly liberal in regard to political matters. It was a class, however, which was rapidly decreasing in numbers and influence, and of John Thomson it has been said, 'he was the last of that class of Scotch clergymen to which Robertson and Playfair belonged—Liberals in secular and Moderates in ecclesiastical politics.' He was to Art what they in

the church were to literature and science: the ripe scholar, the poetical artist, the man of the world, and yet the clergyman too. Few men of his time enjoyed a larger share of the society and friendship of men of kindred genius; and whether they were Whigs or Tories, Moderates or Evangelicals, all were alike recognised by him as friends and brethren.

Nor must the influence of Mrs. Thomson in this connection be overlooked. As a minister's wife she excelled. We have seen how keenly she interested herself in the cultivation of the service of praise; and as the result of her exertions, few parish churches could boast of this part of the service being so well conducted as Duddingston in the first part of the century. But in other respects she was equally helpful, visiting the sick, relieving distress, and interesting herself and the people in Christian work. Among the young she was a special favourite; every Sabbath morning at 8.30 she had a Sabbath-school in the manse, which was well attended by the children of the village. Who can sufficiently estimate the value of such work? 'Next to the work of the Christian ministry,' it has well been said, 'comes the work done by ministers' wives.' We would even go a step further, and say that the peace and prosperity of a congregation depend at least as much upon the mistress of the manse as on its minister.

The duties of that important office, the parish beadle, were in Thomson's day performed, no doubt with the utmost satisfaction to himself, by an old man named John Richardson. John, like many of his class, was a character in his way, not without an element of humour in his composition. His duties as 'minister's man' brought him almost daily about the manse, where he was treated as a privileged friend rather than as a servant. He had

quite a literary taste, and often when he had a little spare time, or as a reward for any extra exertion, his master would send him for perusal his copy of Shakespeare, an author of whom he was fond to enthusiasm. The circumstance passed with him into a proverb, so that on the occurrence of any piece of good fortune, or faring somewhat better than usual in the kitchen, he would say, with a smack of satisfaction in his voice, 'Ay, ay! it's no' every day we get Shakespeare to read!'

In the way of criticism John could be unconsciously true, if somewhat severe, even when most desirous to be complimentary. On one occasion Mr. Thomson had to be from home on the Sabbath day, and had engaged a young country minister to occupy the pulpit in his absence, of whose capabilities as a preacher he was not very confident. On his return he interrogated John as to how the young divine had got on. 'Deed, sir,' said the beadle, 'just middlin'; it was guid coorse country wark, but there's naebody jumbles the judgment and confuses the sense sae weel as yersel.'

His attachment to the minister and his family was unbounded, and the boys especially were a great source of solicitude to the worthy man. He was quite a favourite with them, and many sly pranks were played off upon him. When Edward and Henry (Thomson's two youngest sons) left home to go abroad, the old man formulated in his family devotions a special prayer on their behalf that 'the Lord would watch over Master Edward and Master Henry when they were on the stormy deep, and bring them in safety to their destined haven'; but, once introduced into his prayers, it seemed difficult to give up his special petition, and he repeated it so often that it became stereotyped; and so, long after the lads had safely arrived in Australia, honest John still went on praying



From the Collection of the Hon. the Earl of Devon

that Edward and Henry might be brought in safety to their destined haven!

He was very fond of a dram, and was a frequent and generally a welcome guest at one or other of the several public-houses which were then in Duddingston, where his manse gossip suffered nothing in the telling. His being so much in the pulpit had no doubt something to do with his frequent use—not always reverently, it is to be feared—of Scripture phrases, which he would apply in rather a comical style. One day he was busy putting up a new ‘stob,’ or post, for a gate. The minister happened to come along, and seeing him at work said, ‘Well, John, you’re putting in a new stob, are ye? Will that one last long this time?’ ‘Ay will’t, there’s nae fear o’ this yin,’ said John, ‘it’ll last till the judgment day *in the afternoon!*’

CHAPTER VI

1813—1834

Sketching Excursions—Inverness, Moray, Arran, Kintyre, Skye—The Blair-Adam or 'Macduff' Club—Its Origin—Annual Outings—Scott's *Journal*—Loch Leven, etc.—'John Thomson's delightful flute'—Falkland Palace—Culross—A Sunday at Lochore—'Let off'—'No Sermon'—Reminiscences—Cassillis House—The Hereditary Gardener of the Earl of Monteith—Thomson at Abbotsford—The Bannatyne Club—Thomas Thomson and the Acts of the Scottish Parliament—Club Suppers—Characteristics—Lord Cockburn's opinion of Thomas Thomson—Death of Sir Walter Scott—Visit to Sir David Brewster—Badenoch.



THROUGHOUT his life, and more particularly after his settlement at Duddingston, Thomson visited the greater part of Scotland in search of subjects for his easel; and when we consider that he preceded the days of railways and saloon steamers, his excursions, especially into some of the wilder and more inaccessible parts of the country, must have been attended with much risk and fatigue, not to speak of expense. North and south, east and west, he ransacked the coasts and the interior, and were his landscapes now to be brought together in one collection, they would form a most unique exhibition of the castles and strongholds of Scotland. He also paid one or two visits to the Lake District of England, the North of Ireland, and Wales.

Frequently he made these excursions alone, but more fre-

quently—for he was an essentially social man—he had a companion. The pity is, he has left us no record of his wanderings beyond what may be seen on the page of his glowing canvas.

Of Thomson as of Turner, the absence of diary or correspondence leaves us with little material for narrative. Anything of the kind would have been full of interest for us now. But the ‘pen of the ready writer’ was not theirs, and we must look to what they did with the pencil and brush to fill up the blank.

Turning then to the catalogue of Thomson’s exhibited works, and glancing over the long list of these, we may form some estimate of the area covered, of the time and locality of his peregrinations during the thirty-two years of his active artist life after he settled at Duddingston. It is true only a small proportion of his works were exhibited publicly, but probably the most important were those which he showed in Edinburgh in connection with the Royal Institution and the Royal Scottish Academy. During the first ten years (*viz.* from 1806 to 1816) these seem to indicate that he did not go far from the neighbourhood of the manse for subjects for his pencil. A few of his pictures during this period are subjects drawn from Lanarkshire and Haddingtonshire scenery. There are some from the English Lake district, and at least one picture exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, in 1813, ‘View in the Highlands of Scotland,’ indicates his having invaded the country of the Gael. There are also some from Ayrshire, but these may probably be merely reminiscences of his early sketches, though there is no evidence that he did not return to his native county for fresh subjects during these years. But, in addition to these, a considerable number of his early works are taken from the neighbourhood of Duddingston.

More than once Sir Walter Scott refers to Thomson's work at this period in his correspondence with the accomplished Marchioness of Abercorn, in whose well-wooded 'policy' or park adjoining the manse the artist found many good subjects.

Thomson painted a large gallery picture in 1813 of Duddingston House for Lady Abercorn, who was then at the Irish residence of the family, Barons Court, and Scott was so interested in the progress of the picture that, on the occasion of the hurried visit of her son-in-law, Lord Aberdeen, to Edinburgh, he did his best to get him to defer his departure till he had seen it. He wrote her ladyship as follows:—

'8th January 1813.—I have been a great vagabond during the autumn, and since then have been hard at work at my new poem (*Rokeby*), which, with official duty since November, has made me a complete slave. I saw Lord Aberdeen for literally a moment in the midst of the bustle of the Peers' election at Holyrood. . . . I wished he could have stayed a day to look at the painting of Duddingston, etc., by Thomson, but I could not prevail with him.'

Whether it is to this same picture that Sir Walter refers in another letter written to her ladyship on 15th February 1815 is not quite clear. The probability is that it was a fresh commission upon which he was working. 'I spoke,' he says, 'to Mr. Thomson about the picture. He did not like it, it seems, and is doing another. I wish he may be as successful as in one he presented me with, which is really, and without any allowance being required, a very fine thing indeed. It is a view of Crichton Castle, near Edinburgh, once a favourite haunt of mine, but not slavishly correct as to surrounding landscape.' Sir Walter has for ever immortalised the old Castle in *Marmion*—

'For there the Lion's care assigned
 A lodging meet for Marmion's rank.
 That Castle rises on the steep
 Of the green vale of Tyne:
 And far beneath, where slow they creep,
 From pool to eddy, dark and deep,
 Where alders moist, and willows weep,
 You hear her streams repine.'

It was a favourite subject with Thomson, being often painted by him, in oil and water-colour; while both Sir Walter and John Thomson gave their united efforts in pen and pencil to illustrate its scenery in the *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*.

In 1822 and 1824 the wild Haddington and Berwickshire coast claimed a good deal of his attention, and to this period belong his 'Fast Castle,' 'Dunbar Castle,' and 'Aberlady Bay.' In 1826 the splendid scenery of Loch Katrine, Loch Lomond, and Loch Awe formed the subject of some of his many exhibits in the following spring.

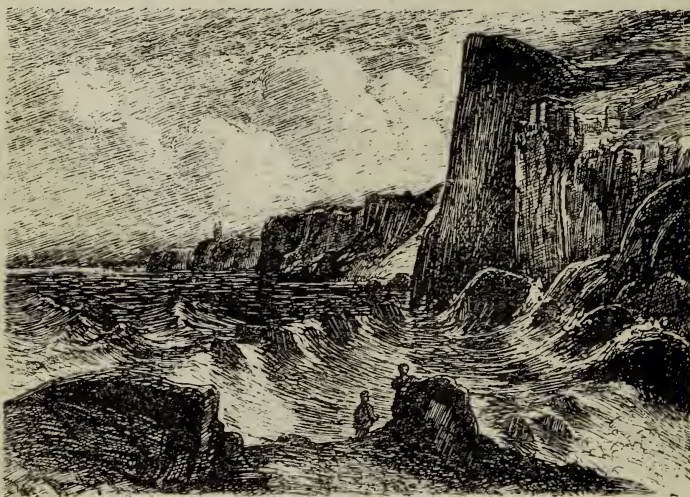


CRICHTON CASTLE

In 1827 Dumfriesshire and the wild country of the highlands of Kirkcudbright were explored, and yielded to his easel his fine

pictures of 'Morton Castle,' 'Torthorwald Castle,' and the 'Martyrs' Tombs,' in the romantic region of Lochinkett, a district which Samuel Rutherford Crockett has since further immortalised in *The Raiders*, *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, and *The Grey Man*.

Thomson evidently visited Inverness and Morayshire in 1828, besides making flying visits to the Yarrow and Tweed, and even to North Wales, where he painted Conway Castle for next year's Exhibition in Edinburgh. On his sketching excursions to Tweed-



FAST CASTLE (FROM THE SEA)

side and Yarrow he was generally the welcome guest of Sir Walter Scott and the Ettrick Shepherd.

In the spring of 1831, in company with Professor Playfair and Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Thomson made a very happy excursion through Aberdeen, Banff, and Inverness for two or three weeks. Some particulars of this outing are given by Sir Thomas in letters



to his wife, extracts from which furnish us with interesting little glimpses of holiday travelling in Scotland before the advent of the railway and the steamboat. Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, the author of a book on the Morayshire Floods of 1829, *The Wolf of Badenoch*, *Highland Legends*, etc., and the proprietor of estates in Edinburgh and the North, was well known among the aristocracy, and the party had thus the *entrée* to many of the mansions and castles of Scotland. The excursion thus brought Thomson into personal touch with much of the loveliest scenery of the North, and with many excellent people.

In the first of the series of letters referred to (13th May 1831) Sir Thomas says—

‘I am arranging to leave town for the North with Playfair and Thomson. I have just this moment returned from Duddingston, where the expedition was fixed. . . . Thomson to bring all manner of paints and sketching materials, and also his flute. He gave me the beautiful picture of the Bass he promised me, and I have just been at Donaldson’s ordering a frame for it.’

Three days later he says—

‘We have not yet finally fixed our plans, but I think we shall probably go through Fife to Glamis Castle, then to Dunnottar Castle, and so on.’

And again, he was at the manse on Wednesday the 18th May, and had ‘delightful music and a pleasant party.’ The three friends appear to have left Edinburgh on Monday, 23rd May, in the early morning, for the North, for they reached Glamis in Forfar that day at one o’clock—

‘Spent that evening very pleasantly in the Castle and about the grounds. Returned to the Castle next morning, and stayed till about

twelve o'clock. Got to Forfar in a chaise, were then taken up by the "Defence," driven by Captain Barclay himself. Got comfortably to Stonehaven on Tuesday evening about a quarter past six o'clock. Went to Dunnottar Castle and gave it a thorough inspection, and returned to it yesterday (25th) morning, and spent the whole day there till the "Defence" coach again came up and we mounted and came on to Aberdeen. I found a letter lying here [Aberdeen] for me from Robert Grant of Monymusk in answer to one I wrote to him from Edinburgh. He gives us a most hospitable welcome, so that we start at eleven o'clock, after breakfast, by a Donside coach, which puts us down within three or four miles of his door. By this visit we shall be able, I hope, to kill off Castle Fraser, and perhaps Kildrummie and Craigievar and even Drum; and then our plan is to get to Turriff, and so to Fyvie, Banff, Trouphead, Portsoy and Boyne Castle, Cullen and Findochtie and Deskford Castles, so that we cannot hope to be with you sooner than the middle of next week. . . . Thomson's time is short, but I must prevail on him to write to Edinburgh to get it extended.'

This letter is addressed (from Aberdeen, 26th May) to Lady Dick Lauder, Relugas, Forbes, and being on their way thither, and time pressing, he says—

'Pray see and get Mr. Wilson to have a lad ready to drive us about with a pair of horses, as we might have occasion for them during the short stay of my two friends.'

From Monymusk on Sunday the 29th May he writes—

'We got here safe on Thursday, and were kindly received by the hospitable landlord and landlady of this mansion. Met Colonel Guern of Clugny at dinner. On Friday we walked up to the old castle of Pitfichie, and viewed some of the scenery of the Don, which is much better here than anywhere else. Drove to call at Castle Fraser; saw Mrs. Fraser, the Colonel being still in London. Drove thence to Clugny Castle, but did not find its owner at home. Yesterday we had a post-chaise, and went all the way to Kildrummie to breakfast. Saw what is called a "Pict's house"

on the moor, visited the old church, and then drove to Craigievar, which is out of sight the most interesting old house I ever was in. We got home here last night to a late dinner at ten o'clock. I go to the English chapel after breakfast, and when it comes out I have ordered the chaise to take me (if it can be overtaken) to Correckie, Drum, and Midmar; at all events I shall walk to Correckie, seven miles off. To-morrow we leave this by six o'clock, and get to Old Meldrum in time to catch the "Earl of Fife" coach so as to get on to Fyvie. There we shall be all night, and shall get on next day to Turriff. And if Thomson should show any desire to go to Trouphead, we shall take a chaise and go round by that bend, so along the coast to Banff, where we shall remain Tuesday night, so as to catch the "Earl of Fife" on Wednesday, which will take us to Portsoy on Thursday, and there we shall see Boyne Castle, Findochtie Castle, and if possible Deskford, and get to Cullen on Friday, so as to be home on Saturday night by the "Earl of Fife" to Fochabers and the mail from thence. But should we *not* make the Trouphead deviation, I am not without hopes we may get to Forres by Wednesday evening's mail.'

Being persuaded, however, to remain another day at Monymusk, the party did not reach Relugas till Friday, where they were doubtless received with open arms by Lady Lauder and 'all the bairns.' Thomson resided with the Lauders at Relugas until the middle of June, sketching on the Findhorn and the neighbouring wild streams of that picturesque district.¹

We have no evidence of Thomson being in the Island of Arran previous to 1832, which is rather remarkable, as its glittering mountain-peaks must have been often in his view from the Ayrshire coast, or from the high-lying grounds of his native parish—glimpses which might have tempted him, one would think, to explore its deep wild glens. But some time before 1833 he had

¹ These extracts are from original letters shown to me by the late Miss C. Dick Lauder, daughter of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder.—W. B.

evidently been there, for he exhibited in that year his fine picture of 'Glen Sannox.'

It was in the summer of 1834, as we shall afterwards see, that he again visited Inverness-shire: this time it was the district of Badenoch, at the base of the Cairngorm mountains, which inspired his pencil. The grandeur of its mountain masses, its dark corries and rugged glens, its lonely lakes and old frowning castles, the majestic Spey, with its steep banks crowned with the dark Scotch pine and the feathery birch, captivated his fancy, and led to the production of several pictures of great merit.

In all probability it was in this or the following year he made a short excursion into South Wales, and painted 'Caerphilly Castle.'

Thomson appears to have made a sketching tour in 1836 in that happy hunting-ground of Scottish artists—the Mull of Kintyre, where rock-bound coast, umbrageous wood, and snug little fishing-coves are so happily blended with lovely peeps of distant mountain-peaks, rising on all sides round the Firth of Clyde.

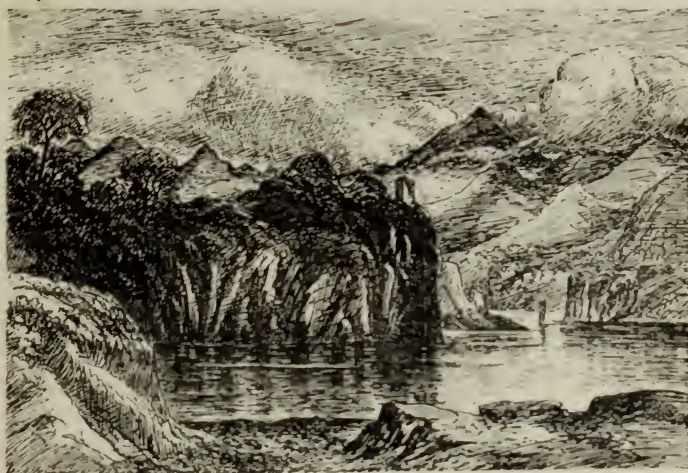
It must have been in the same year he managed to reach the then almost inaccessible shores of the Island of Skye, and painted those magnificent pictures of Loch Coruiskin, Loch Scavaig, Eilandonan Castle on Loch Duich, in the district of Kintail, Carron Castle, and many others in the west of Ross-shire, in which the free open space of the wild mountain ranges is so beautifully rendered.

But his excursions were not always undertaken in the pursuit of subjects for his pencil; not unfrequently they were of a social and convivial nature, as well as for the purposes of Art.

As a member of the celebrated Blair-Adam Club, John Thomson, along with Walter Scott and others, spent annually a few days as

companions in country excursions in Fife, Kinross, and Clackmannanshire, of which we have some interesting reminiscences in Sir Walter's *Journal*. The origin of the club was peculiar, and the bond of union that united its members was only severed at last by death.

The Right Honourable William Adam was appointed in 1815 to



LOCH SCAVAIG

the Presidency of the Court for Jury Trial in Civil Cases, then instituted in Scotland, and he henceforth spent a great part of his time at his paternal seat in Kinross-shire. Here, about midsummer 1816, he received a visit from his near relation William Clerk, Adam Ferguson, his hereditary friend and special favourite, and their lifelong intimate, Walter Scott. They remained with him for two or three days, in the course of which they were all so much delighted with their host and he with

them, that it was resolved to reassemble the party, with a few additions, at the same season of every following year. The Blair-Adam Club, thus formed, consisted of nine regular members, viz. the four already named; the Chief Commissioner's son, Admiral Sir Charles Adam; his son-in-law, Mr. Anstruther Thomson of Charleton; Mr. Thomas Thomson, the Deputy-Register of Scotland; his brother, the Rev. John Thomson, Minister of Duddingston; and Sir Samuel Shepherd, sometime Attorney-General in England, and afterwards Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer in Scotland.

They usually contrived to meet on a Friday; spent the Saturday in a ride to some scene of historical interest within easy distance; enjoyed a quiet Sunday at home—'duly attending divine worship at the Kirk of Cleish'—gave Monday morning to another antiquarian excursion, and returned to Edinburgh in time for the Courts of Tuesday. 'From 1816 to 1831 inclusive,' says Lockhart, 'Sir Walter was a constant attendant at these meetings,' and the club visited in succession such places as Castle Campbell, Magus Moor, Falkland, Dunfermline, St. Andrews, Loch Leven, and many other scenes of ancient celebrity. 'To one of these trips,' says he, 'we must ascribe his dramatic sketch of *Macduff's Cross*;' and to that of the dog days of 1819 we owe the weightier obligation of *The Abbot*,' which was published in 1820. Occasionally it is designated the Macduff Club by Lockhart, who, in referring to Thomson's connection with it, speaks of him as 'a most diligent parish priest, but who has found leisure to make himself one of the first masters of the British School of landscape painting.'

John Thomson seems rarely to have lost an opportunity of



Forest Landscape
The Forest of the Forest of the Forest

forming one of this annual outing of friends, and in the *Journal* of Scott the references to the club are frequent and genial, giving us delightful little glimpses of their trips. Here are a few extracts:—

‘June 27, 1828.—I came out after Court to Blair-Adam with our excellent friend the Rev. John Thomson of Duddingston; a delightful drive and passage at the Ferry. We found at Blair-Adam the Chief Commissioner and family, Admiral Adam and Lady, James Thomson of Charleton, and Miss Thomson, Will Clerk, and last, not least, Lord Chief Baron Shepherd—all in high spirits for our excursion.’

‘June 28.—Off we go to Castle Campbell after breakfast; *i.e.* Will Clerk, Admiral Adam, John Thomson, and myself. Tremendous hot is the day; and the steep ascent of the Castle, which rises for two miles up a rugged, broken path, was fatiguing enough, yet not so much so as the streets of London.’

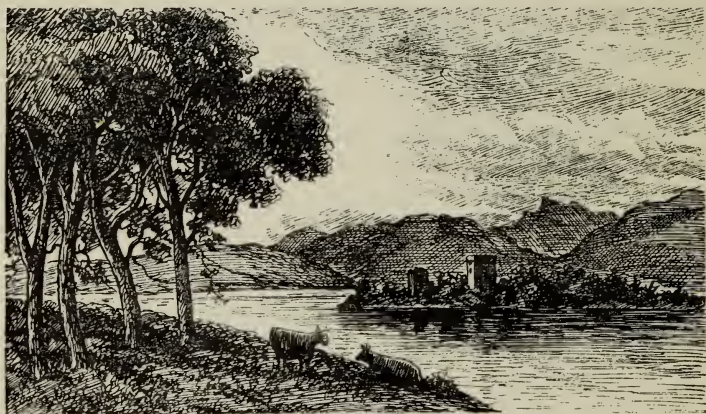
‘June 29.—Being Sunday, we kept about the doors, and after two o’clock took the drosky and drove over the hill and round the Kierly Craigs.’

‘June 30.—We made our pleasant excursion to-day round the hill of Bennarty *par terre*, and returned *par mer*. Our route by the land led us past Lochore, Ballingray, and so by Kirkness down to the shores of Loch Leven. We embarked and went upon St. Serf’s Island. . . . We landed on Queen Mary’s Island—a miserable scene considering the purpose for which the castle was appointed.’

To the romancer and the artist of the party such scenes would doubtless afford different trains of thought. Scott, his mind stored with traditions of the past, would view the ruined cell and castle in their human aspect; while Thomson, with the artist’s eye, would revel in the ruins and their surrounding verdure as fitting subjects for his pencil.

If the Island of St. Serf, taking us away back to the sixth

century, with its early Culdee Mission from Iona, has been practically overlooked and forgotten, the other island, with its purely secular, but equally romantic, associations connected with the imprisonment of the hapless Queen Mary, roused the creative fancy of the poet, who in the pages of *The Abbot* has infused a deeper tone of feeling into the history of her captivity and escape.



LOCHLEVEN

There can be little doubt but that Thomson improved the opportunities which visits to such romantic scenes afforded, and transferred to his sketch-book some useful memoranda for after use.

The evening of this day was spent at Blair-Adam in the greatest hilarity; the enjoyment of the company, as we have already indicated, being not a little enhanced by what Sir Walter Scott calls 'John Thomson's delightful flute.'

In June of the following year—1829—the Blair-Adam Club celebrated its twelfth annual meeting by a series of excursions

and dinners extending over four days, and though Sir Walter's health was considerably impaired at this time by the excessive over-work which he imposed upon himself in his honourable endeavour to meet his obligations in full, he seems to have enjoyed these outings with his wonted juvenility of spirit.

'June 26, 1829.—After the Court, we set off—the two Thomsons and I—for Blair-Adam, where we held our Macduff Club for the twelfth anniversary. We met the Chief Baron, Lord Sydney Osborne, Will Clerk, the merry knight Sir Adam Ferguson, with our venerable host the Lord Chief Commissioner, and merry men were we!'

'June 27.—The morning proving delightful, we set out for the object of the day, which was Falkland. We passed through Lochore, but without stopping, . . . also we went through Leslie, and saw what remains of the celebrated rendezvous of rustic gallantry called "Christ's Kirk on the Green."'

A visit to the ancient palace of Falkland seems to have given the antiquarian tastes of the party the utmost satisfaction; and if its neglected grandeur as the residence of the Stuart Kings pleased Sir Walter, and drew from him the remark that 'a ruin should be protected, but never repaired,' we may be sure its gloomy, massive towers would find themselves transferred to John Thomson's pocket-book for after use in some bright canvas.

The party having dined at Wellfield with George Cheape, 'an old cavalry comrade of thirty years previous,' Scott's entry concludes, 'much mirth and good wine made us return in capital tune.' Thus ended this Saturday's excursion.

On the Monday following, Sir Walter, with Thomas and John Thomson, returned to Edinburgh to resume their professional harness.

On the 18th June 1830, John Thomson and Sir Walter Scott again find themselves the guests of Chief Commissioner Adam at Blair-Adam, but Thomas Thomson appears not to have been of the party on this occasion.

The following day was spent in an excursion to Culross, to visit the ancient Priory, which at the time was being rebuilt by the proprietor as a family residence.

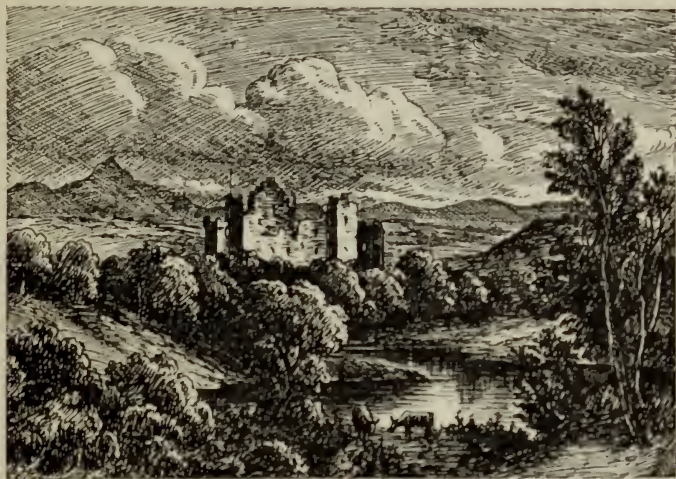
The next day thereafter being Sunday, 'we settled to go to church at Lochore, that is at Ballingray, but when we came to the earthly paradise, so called, we were let off, for there was no sermon, for which I could not in my heart be sorry. So, after looking at Lochore, back we came to lounge and loiter about till dinner-time. The rest of the day was good company, good cheer, and good conversation.'

In other passages Scott refers to the pleasure it gave him to have personal intercourse with Mr. Thomson, the latter's ample topographical knowledge being frequently of service to him in descriptions of places for his novels. Sir Walter's aphorism, 'Give me facts, and I will find fancy for myself,' has a fitting illustration in one or two such conversations during these summer excursions which he has recorded.

'Thomson described to me,' says Scott, 'a fine dungeon at Cassillis in Ayrshire. There is an outer and inner vaulted chamber, each secured by iron doors. At the upper end of the innermost are two great stones, or blocks, to which the staples and chains used in securing the prisoners are still attached. Between these stone seats is an opening like the mouth of a still deeper dungeon. The entrance descends like the mouth of a draw-well, or shaft of a mine, and deep below is heard the sullen roar of the river Doon,

one branch of which, passing through the bottom of the shaft, has probably swept away the body of many a captive, whose body after death may have been thus summarily disposed of. *I may find use for such a place.'*

Thomson was well acquainted with the rugged Ayrshire coast, with its crumbling castles of Greenan, Dunure, and Turnberry. The classic Doon and Girvan Water were no less acquainted with



DOUNE CASTLE, PERTHSHIRE

his footsteps; but in this description we cannot help thinking that Sir Walter's 'fancy' made more of the stronghold of the Kennedys than facts actually warranted.

Scott on another occasion seems to have immensely enjoyed a story told by Thomson, illustrating Highland ideas of hereditary descent. 'A clergyman who showed the artist over the island of Inchmahome, on the Port of Monteith, where he happened to be sketching, pointed the boatman out to him as a remarkable person,

the representative of the hereditary gardeners of the Earls of Monteith, while these Earls existed. His son, a priggish boy, follows up the theme: "Feyther, when Donald MacCorkindale dees, will na' the family be extinct?" *Father*—"No; I believe there is a man in Balquhiddie wha takes up the *succession*!"

Though Thomson was fully seven years Scott's junior, as time wore on this disparity of ages (no doubt very considerable in their early years) had almost entirely worn off, and in 1830, when Thomson was on a visit to Abbotsford, we find Scott saying of him, 'we took the same old persons for subjects of correspondence, of feeling, and sentiment. The difference of *ten* years is little, after sixty.'—(*Journal*.) Scott evidently was under the impression that Thomson was a younger man than he really was, or he would not have made this mistake.

On another occasion, at Abbotsford, when Thomson was one of a small party of friends to dinner, Scott speaks of 'having a pleasant evening, as such a handful always secures.'

The dinners of the Bannatyne Club, of which Scott was the founder and first president, and Thomas Thomson vice-president, brought a congenial circle of friends frequently together in Edinburgh, and at these Scott presided from 1823 to 1831. In the affairs of the club Scott took a most active part. The books published by it constitute a very curious and valuable library of Scottish history and antiquities; and the example has been followed by many others, such as the Maitland, the Abbotsford, the Spalding, the Grampian Clubs, and the Scottish History Society.

Scott was ably seconded in this work by Thomas Thomson, John Thomson's elder brother, who, as an antiquarian lawyer, was unsurpassed in his day, and was the first to bring the mass of

State papers and Acts of the Scottish Parliament, lying in the Register House, Edinburgh, into some kind of order and method. His appointment in 1806 to the charge of the Register Office as Deputy-Clerk Register made him a most invaluable ally to Scott, for it was largely through Thomas Thomson that Scott became acquainted with many old, forgotten, and out-of-the-way incidents in Scottish history which he turned to good account in his Novels and his *Tales of a Grandfather*. Throughout all Sir Walter Scott's works, while there may be mistakes as to historical facts, there is a very remarkable accuracy of historical tone. As one writer puts it, 'He might be wrong in dates and names, and the sequence of occurrences, but he was ever accurate in painting the manners and temper of the times, and giving their true character to events. And we believe we will be borne out by those who have had the best means of knowing it, when we say that he owed this accuracy in a great measure to the instructing and regulating influence of Thomson's mind.' It was a mind not given to the development of mere separate details, but to careful digesting and arrangement so as to evolve clear, orderly, and simple results. Scott ever speaks of him in the kindest terms, and in one of his letters says, 'He understands more of old books, old laws, and old history than any man in Scotland.' Their evenings together over such subjects were frequently shared in by the minister of Duddingston, who, if he did not profess to be an authority on such subjects, was at all events as good a listener as when they occupied the lodgings in Hamilton's Entry many years before.

Here is one instance mentioned by Scott:—

'8 July 1826. This evening supped with Thomas Thomson about affairs of the Bannatyne Club. There were present the Dean, Will Clerk, John Thomson, young Smythe of Methven; very pleasant.'

And in entering up his *Journal* next day, as if he had not said enough about it, he continues:—

‘There are people who would confine the Club much to one party; but those who were together last night saw it in the true and liberal point of view as a great historical institution, which may do much good in the way of publishing our old records, providing we do not fall into the usual habit of antiquaries, and neglect what is useful for things that are only curious. Thomas Thomson is a host for such an undertaking.’

Thomas Thomson was indeed in many respects a remarkable man; a man who, but for what Lord Cockburn tersely calls ‘some silly habits,’ ought to have been ‘a great counsel and a great judge.’ Among these ‘silly habits’ he could not be charged with laziness or indolence, for he was always busy; but he had, unfortunately, an inveterate habit of delaying the completion of anything he had on hand, combined with a too fastidious taste. His edition of the *Scottish Statutes* is a great national work, with which his name will ever be honourably associated; but it was a bitter disappointment to him that he was not permitted to finish it. Over-fastidiousness on his part as to publication of the first and most important volume after the issue of the bulkier part of the work, for which he had reserved his deepest historical views, caused official impatience to interfere, and the Government at length, getting wearied with repeated delays, took it out of his hands.

Lord Cockburn, one of his intimate friends, speaks of Thomas Thomson’s bachelor suppers as great intellectual feasts. ‘They were always held,’ says he, ‘in his admirable library, and were the habitual resort of the best Edinburgh people. With good wine

and exquisite punch, plenty of business for dignity, and never in want of leisure for friends, he had all the elements of luxurious private society. Night was then his day; his house seemed never dark; his library lamp was always outwatching the Bear. No castaway friend ever failed to have that Pharos of hospitality to steer upon' (*Journal*, vol. ii. p. 285). This remarkable man outlived many of his contemporaries. He died in October 1852 at the venerable age of eighty-three, surviving his younger brother John by fully twelve years, and enjoying to the last the respect of all classes, and especially of the legal profession.

To what extent the minister of Duddingston participated in his brother's hospitality we cannot pretend to say. The friendships formed and sustained by intercourse with such men as were in the habit of frequenting his house must have been wide and varied. Lord Cockburn, who was one of the circle, and often shared with Scott in the gaiety of Thomson's suppers, speaks with rapture of Scott's conversational powers on these occasions, of which he says no bad idea could be formed by supposing one of his novels '*cut into talk*.' 'It is not so much conversation as a joyous flow of anecdote, story, character, and scene, mostly humorous, always graphic, and never personal or ill-natured.'

The death of Sir Walter Scott in 1832 brought to a close a long and happy, almost uninterrupted, period of warmest friendship. John Thomson felt his loss with the utmost keenness, and well he might. Their lifelong intercourse had been of the pleasantest; without a jarring note. Scott's visits to him at Duddingston, and his to Abbotsford, were occasions when Nature and Art found in both a common subject for fellowship. Thomson was frequently at Abbotsford in these latter years of the great novelist, when he was

slowly eating his heart away; when family bereavements and pecuniary losses were alike heavy; and he was writing novels at such a rate that, as he himself says, he had 'generally written to the middle of one of these without having the least idea how it was to end; in short, in a *hab-nab-at-a-venture* style of composition.'

Another eminent scholar who may be named among the intimates of Thomson was the learned Principal of Edinburgh University. For Sir David Brewster, as a scientist and as a man, he had a warm affection. It was in 1833 that Sir David Brewster succeeded to the beautiful Highland estate of Belleville, near Aviemore, in Strathspey, where for several years thereafter he resided during the summer. Here, in this sweet spot (associated as it is with his father-in-law, James Macpherson, the translator of Ossian's *Poems*, who purchased the property and built an elegant mansion upon it, where he died in 1796), Brewster spent some of his happiest years, and awakened among his Highland tenantry a warm and abiding attachment for himself and his family. His old friend, John Thomson, visited him there in 1834, and fairly revelled in the glories of the Grampian scenery, with which the district of Badenoch abounds. The beauties of the Doune, Kinrara, and Aviemore, Loch-an-Eilan, Loch Insh, Loch Laggan, Craighdu, the Forest of Gaick, and the magnificent desolation of Glen Feshie were all vividly enjoyed by both. Brewster, in whom existed a strong sense of poetry and art, deeply sympathised with and recognised the same natural temperament in Thomson. Many long walks over the hills and moors the two enjoyed together. Among other places they visited was Glen Feshie, with its wild corries and its rocky, brawling stream, overshadowed by the giants of the old pine forest. It is a strangely impressive wilderness; to a poetic imagination, full of mystery and awe. On

one occasion as the two men paced along amid its savage wildness few words passed between them. Here and there they stopped to stand and wonder, but the grandeur of the scene was too great for words, and the deepest reverence seemed to fill their souls. In one of these pauses, after a profound silence, Sir David was startled by the exclamation, 'Lord God Almighty!' and on looking round he saw the strong man bowed down in a flood of tears 'so much,' says Mrs. Gordon (Brewster's daughter), 'had the wild grandeur of the scene, and the sense of the one creative hand, possessed the soul of the artist.' He was completely overcome.

Thomson, as the result of his visit to Strathspey, painted a number of pictures, representing views in the district, many of which are of first-rate excellence. In the Royal Scottish Academy's Exhibition of 1835 and 1836 he exhibited pictures of Glen Feshie, one of which, now in the possession of the Earl of Stair at Oxenfoord, is perhaps his most successful attempt at Highland scenery. It is a magnificent gallery picture, measuring five feet three inches by three feet six inches, powerful in conception and execution, brilliant in colour, and full of wonderful gradation of light and shade. It is, verily, a poem on canvas.

When at Belleville he painted a view of the house and grounds which still adorns the walls of the mansion; while several of the neighbouring gentry gave him commissions for pictures of Grampian scenery. If we are not much mistaken, it was to this visit to Strathspey we are indebted for the several fine pictures of bold rocky, river subjects from the Findhorn, of which the 'Pulpit on the Findhorn' is a fair example.

CHAPTER VII

Declining Health—Death—Funeral—Mr. Thomson's Family—Dr. Thomas Thomson of Leamington—Captain John Thomson—Loss of the *Kent*—Personal Character and Disposition.

'I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;
Nature I loved; and next to Nature, Art.
I warm'd both hands against the fire of life,
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.'—LANDOR.



ABOUT the beginning of the year 1840 Mr. Thomson's health, which hitherto had been exceptionally good, began to fail him. He was easily fatigued, and did not feel himself equal to undertake much outdoor exercise. But though no improvement took place during the summer, he still worked on at picture and sermon. In the autumn he was decidedly worse, and was compelled to lay aside his ministerial duties and get an assistant. During the month of September he was so feeble that he felt obliged to keep to his room, but occasionally the old love of Art would seize him, and it was with difficulty his brushes and colours were kept out of his reach. Sometimes he was humoured in this, and permitted to indulge in his favourite pursuit. Just nine days before his death his last effort was to paint a view of Torthorwald Castle, Dumfriesshire (of course from a sketch), a picture which has been much admired as a piece of colour.



Forest of Cedar
Cedar Mountain, Park of the Yosemite Valley

Many anxious friends sought to comfort and cheer him during this trying time, and above all he was tenderly nursed by his loving wife. But it was all in vain. By the middle of October he was prostrate on a sick-bed, and it was only too apparent that notwithstanding the best medical skill and assiduous nursing, the lamp of life was quickly burning itself down to the socket. Every succeeding day found him weaker than before. He was attended by Dr. Alexander Monro of Edinburgh, Professor of Anatomy in the University, who, from the fact that he was the third of the same name who had occupied this post, is sometimes designated Dr. Monro *Tertius*.

On the 27th of the month a young man, a friend and pupil, who assisted him with his canvases and brushes, came into the room along with one of his sons. The minister felt weaker and worse than usual, and a strong presentiment that his last day on earth had come possessed his mind. It was the afternoon, and the setting sun of a shortened day sent its slanting rays into the room. He desired his son and young friend to move his bed toward the window that he might look for the last time on the scene he loved so well, and on that sun whose setting orb he had so often painted. His fancy was indulged; he sat up and gazed with intense earnestness on the beautiful landscape for some time, until the effort proving too much for his strength, he sank back on his pillow and fainted with fatigue.

It was a farewell interview between old friends; an eternal leave-taking. The sun went down in crimson and gold over the reeds and willows of the Loch. The mists of a chill October night gathered over the water. Craigmillar Castle and the distant Pentland Hills were lost to view, never more to gladden his eyes.

Next morning, ere the orb of day had gilded the eastern horizon, the spirit had 'passed through the gates into the city.'

He died early on the morning of 28th October 1840, at the age of sixty-two, and after a ministry in the Church of Scotland of forty-one years, the greater part of which was spent in Duddingston.

They laid him to rest in the south-west corner of his own quiet churchyard, beside his favourite Loch, and in view of the crags of Arthur Seat. No more fitting place could possibly be found for a lover of Nature—

'It is a lovely spot. The sultry sun
From his meridian height, endeavours vainly
To pierce the shadowy foliage, while the zephyr
Comes wafting gently o'er the rippling Loch.

It is a nook

Most pleasant ; such a one, perchance, did Gray
Frequent, as with a vagrant muse he wantoned.'

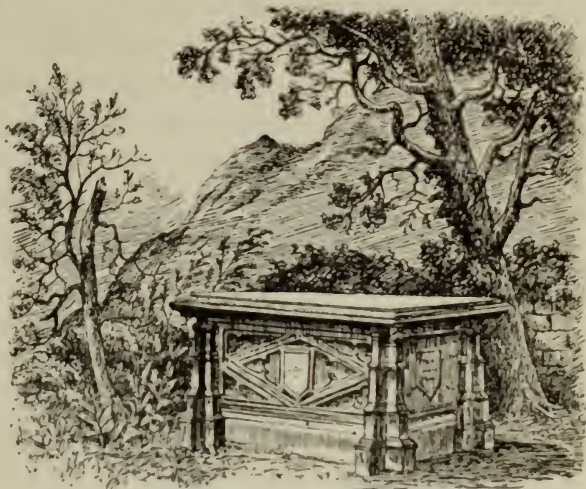
A handsome monument erected by his family, now marks the spot, on which is the following Latin inscription :—

MEMORIAE SACRUM
VIRI REVERENDI ET ADMODUM DILECTI
JOANNIS THOMSON
PER XXXV. FERE ANNOS HUIUSCE ECCLESIAE
IN SACRIS MINISTRI
OB EXIMIAS INGENII DOTES
MORUM SUAVITATEM ET CANDOREM
SUMMAMQUE BENEVOLENTIAM
HAUD BREVI SUIS OBLIVISCENDI
OBIIT V. CALEND. NOVEMB. A.D.
MDCCCXL.
AETATIS LXII.

which may be freely translated as follows :—

'Sacred to the memory of John Thomson, a man revered and greatly beloved, for nearly thirty-five years minister of this church, who on account of the exceptional gifts of his genius, the gentleness and purity of his disposition, and his extreme benevolence, will not soon be forgotten by his friends. He died on the fifth day before the Calends of November, A.D. 1840, aged sixty-two years.'

The Rev. John Thomson was survived for five years by his devoted partner in life. At his death Mrs. Thomson left the manse, and afterwards resided in



THOMSON'S TOMB

Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, where she died on the 11th October 1845.

Of his family we give the following particulars.

By his first wife, Isabella Ramsay, there were five children:—

1. DR. THOMAS THOMSON. Born at Dailly, 17th May 1802. Settling in Stratford-on-Avon as a physician, he became highly popular there, and was for several years Mayor of the town. He afterwards removed to Leamington, where his skill and general kindness of disposition brought him into much repute. He married Miss James, daughter of Dr. James, a celebrated London physician,

by whom he had five daughters—Fanny, Isabella, Caroline, Mary Helen, and Annie.

Dr. Thomson died at Leamington, January 1873.

2. JOHN THOMSON. Born at Dailly, 15th November 1803. At an early age he entered the Royal Navy, but afterwards joined the East India Company's Maritime Service, and rose from Lieutenant to the rank of Captain. It was while he was acting in the former capacity on board the ill-fated East Indiaman, *The Kent*, that she caught fire in the Bay of Biscay, a few days after leaving England, with six hundred and forty-one souls on board, including a large number of women and children who were accompanying a regiment to India.

The calamity occurred on the 1st March 1825, and was caused by the accidental upsetting of a lamp in the hold, where one of the ship's officers was endeavouring to secure some of the cargo which had shifted by the lurching of the vessel. Owing to the highly inflammable nature of the cargo, the hold was in a few moments blazing beyond hope of extinction, though the captain and crew did everything possible to lessen the rapidity of its action by letting in volumes of water from the port-holes. From a most interesting narrative published at the time by one of the passengers of the events connected with the destruction of the ship and the rescue of great part of her living freight, we gather some particulars as to the active share young Thomson had in the work of saving those on board. Very gallantly indeed he filled his post.

After everything had been done by the captain and crew, but in vain, to extinguish the fire, a feeling of despair came over all, and a scene of horror ensued that baffled all description—

The Kent

‘Then rose from sea and sky the wild farewell,
Then shriek’d the timid, and stood still the brave.’

The upper deck was covered with between six and seven hundred human beings, many of whom, from previous sea-sickness, were forced on the first alarm to flee from below in a state of absolute helplessness, and were now running about in quest of husbands, children, or parents. While some were standing in silent resignation, or in stupid insensibility to their impending fate, others were yielding themselves up to the most frantic despair. Some were on their knees imploring mercy of Heaven, while others sullenly took their seats directly over the powder magazine, hoping, as they said, that when it exploded a speedy termination would be put to their sufferings. It was when all were paralysed by the calamity, and active energy seemed useless, that it occurred to young John Thomson, the fourth mate, to send a man to the foretop, rather with the ardent wish than the expectation that some friendly sail might be discovered on the stormy deep. The sailor on mounting caught sight of a sail on the lee bow, and immediately the joyful news rang through the *Kent*, and hope succeeded to despair. Signals were made, and the brig *Cambria* bore down upon the ill-fated ship. But the difficulty now presented itself of transferring so large a number of human beings from the one vessel to the other in the raging sea then running. The attempt must, however, be made; the boats were manned, and preparations made for rescuing the women and children first. The utmost order was preserved, thanks to the coolness of Captain Cobb, aided by the military officers on board; and not a man was allowed to leave the burning deck until every woman and child had been rescued. The first boat to leave the *Kent* for the ark,

of refuge' was under charge of young Thomson, and it is an interesting fact that it was he who handed up the first to be received into the *Cambria*, and who brought the last one saved from the wreck. The first was a child of only a few weeks old, the infant son of Major Macgregor, who in after years came to be well known as a traveller and explorer, and who has delighted the world with his experiences in so frail a bark as a paddle canoe. Though too young to remember his rescue from the burning *Kent*, 'Rob Roy' Macgregor ever bore to his brave deliverer a warm and grateful affection; and a life of usefulness, spent with Lord Shaftesbury in saving many poor boys from the London streets and setting them in the way of earning an honest living, was a grand recompense for his early rescue from death by fire or water.

Throughout the whole of that weary day and far on into the night John Thomson stuck manfully to his post, making trip after trip to the burning wreck; and even when expostulation and entreaty had failed to induce a few terrified creatures to leave her at the last, he persevered in keeping his boat at the ship's stern to save them if possible. By means of the boats 301 officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates of the 31st Regiment, 46 women and 48 children, 19 male and female private passengers, and Captain Cobb and 139 of the crew, amounting in all to 554, were rescued. In the 'narrative' in question the highest praise is given to Lieutenant Thomson, to whose spirited conduct and indefatigable exertions much of this result was due; while Captain Cook of the *Cambria*, in reporting the incidents of the wreck to his agents, also singles him out, along with Mr. Philip, the boatswain, for warmest commendation.

The circumstances connected with the occurrence made a great impression throughout the country at the time, and on the arrival

of the tidings at Duddingston Manse, Mr. Thomson, we are told, 'shed tears of delight and honest pride at the noble conduct of his son,' and whenever the event was mentioned afterwards it was evidently a source of the utmost satisfaction.

Lieutenant Thomson afterwards rose to the rank of Captain in the East India Company's service, and was frequently several years abroad at a stretch with his vessel, the *Duke of York*. It is related that on one occasion when his ship was out about a day from England, he fell in with a homeward-bound troopship, which signalled them for a doctor. Captain Thomson brought his ship to; the gig was lowered, and he had his foot on the ladder to go with the doctor when something detained him, and the doctor went alone. On the doctor's return he was evidently much impressed, and said to the Captain, 'I have seen a sad sight; as fine a young fellow as you could imagine in the last stage of malarial fever; he will never reach home alive.' He did not; and, strange to say, it afterwards transpired that it was young Molyneux Dalrymple, Captain Thomson's own half-brother, the surgeon had been to see, and whom he had just missed saying good-bye to.

After 1848, when Captain Thomson was married, he got an appointment at Poole harbour, from which he was transferred to the charge of the coastguard at Peterhead, where he served for ten years. For the last twenty-five years of his life he was Inspecting Officer of the Inverness division of the coastguard at Cromarty. He died there 4th May 1870, leaving a widow and three daughters. These are Joanne (Mrs. Ogilvie), Caroline, widow of Dr. J. Headley Neale, Leicester; and Miss Isabella Thomson, who is a teacher at Prestonpans.

3. MARGARET. Born at Dailly, 13th October 1805. She died

at Duddingston Manse on 12th February 1827, in the 22nd year of her age.

4. MARY. Born 21st November 1806. Died in infancy.

5. ISABELLA. Born at Duddingston Manse on the 1st April 1809. Married to Robert Scott Lauder, R.S.A., 10th September 1833, and had issue the following children :—

HELEN THOMSON. Born at Rome, 6th September 1834, where she died, aged seventeen months.

HENRY SCOTT LAUDER. Born at Rome, 15th June 1837.

ISABELLA SCOTT LAUDER. Born in London, 14th July 1839. Married to her cousin, Mr. James Thomson (who died in December 1897), and has issue two sons.

JOHN THOMSON LAUDER. Born 27th November 1841; died 16th November 1865.

ROBERT SCOTT LAUDER. Born 27th January 1844; died 4th June 1887.

Mrs. Lauder died on 27th August 1869, and Robert Scott Lauder on 21st April of the same year.

By his second wife, Frances Ingram Spence, or Dalrymple, the Rev. John Thomson had three sons and two daughters. These were—

1. FRANCIS THOMSON. Born at Duddingston, 17th October 1814. He was a member of the medical profession, and practised for some years at Peterhead, where he died, 4th October 1858. He was married to a Miss Nisbet, but they had no family.

2. EMILY. Born 4th September 1816, at Duddingston.

3. MARY HELEN. Born 6th December 1817; died 13th January 1819.

4. HENRY FRANCIS THOMSON. Born at Duddingston, May 1819.

After a somewhat chequered career, he died in Ceylon, where he was a coffee-planter.

5. EDWARD THOMSON. Born at Duddingston on 19th April 1821. When a comparatively young man he went to Australia 'to push his fortune.' He bought an extensive tract of land, but it did not prove a remunerative speculation. Being, like his father, an adept at the brush, he took to Art; but appreciation of Art was yet a thing of the future in the Colonies, and many good paintings of his, we have been told, were sent home for sale. He died in Australia from the result of an accident while out riding in the bush. He was married, but at his death left no family.

Besides those we have named, Mrs. Thomson brought with her on her marriage three of her four children by Mr. Dalrymple, of whom the third—Emily Dalrymple—a young girl of eight years, died in July 1815; so that at the manse it might be said there were three families in one, which, on a certain occasion, provoked the humorous remark by Mrs. Thomson, when introducing the young people to a visitor: 'That's my family; that's John's family; but these (pointing to the youngest) are ours.'

The care and responsibility of this tripartite family must have been no light matter; and doubtless the good people of the manse found it so in their experience.

Death, as we have seen, was a not unfrequent visitor, and more than once Thomson's family circle was sadly broken, young and hopeful lives being rudely snatched away, calling forth from his old friend, Sir Walter Scott, on one occasion the sympathetic line—'Poor fellow, he has had many misfortunes in his family.' How true it is that in every man's cup there are some bitter drops

and who shall search into the heart that bleeds? To lay loved ones in the lonesome grave—to miss the merry laugh and the glad welcome—to see the fairest flower in our garden wither, the brightest light in our household quenched—or to have fond hopes of success in youthful lives perversely wrecked for ever—these are trials hard to bear. But these recurring losses and griefs were draughts which the good minister of Duddingston drank in the deep silence of unmurmuring patience and resignation. Naturally endowed with a cheerful, buoyant disposition, he was not a man inclined to undervalue the pleasures of life, or to make too great a virtue of earthly happiness. The many incidental possibilities and standing problems of human suffering were too frequently thrust upon him both in his private and official capacity for this. But they certainly developed in his character much of that generous Christian sympathy for others for which he was distinguished. This sympathy of his was the spontaneous, cheerful outflow of a sunny, gladsome heart, that recognised the fact that in every landscape there is some cloud, a mildew on every flower, but hopefully loved to look at the bright side of things, and see on the edge of the darkest cloud some silver lining; and not the moping, hopeless feeling of grief that must be submitted to, because it cannot be helped. If there be truth in the assertion of Robert Browning in the ‘Two Poets of Croisic,’ that other conditions being equal, the greater poet is he who leads the happier life and ‘triumphs over suffering,’ it will, we think, be admitted that as a true poet, which his friend Sir Walter Scott asserted he was, John Thomson had the faculty in a large degree of rising above misfortune.

‘A strong since joyful man, who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.’

CHAPTER VIII

Thomson's Influence on Scottish Art—Review—Popular Indifference—Dr. John Macculloch on Scenery—Pennant and Johnson—Scott as a Word Painter—Thomson as an Artist—The Edinburgh Artists—First Edinburgh Exhibition—The Royal Institution : its History, Exhibitions, and Lord Cockburn on its Defects—The Scottish Academy.

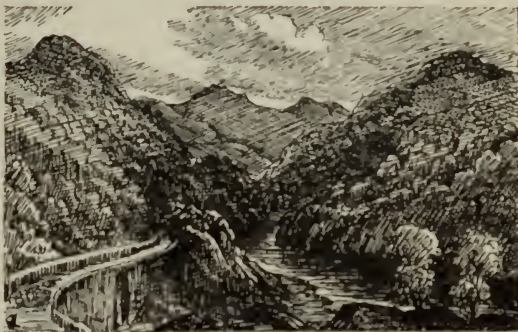


THE influence of the Rev. John Thomson on the art world of his day was very remarkable. Never professing to be anything but an amateur, he was yet a very potent factor in the origination of the Scottish school of landscapists.

Scotland at the beginning of the century was miserably far behind in the matter of Art. She had no doubt produced a few notable portrait-painters, as Jamesone, Allan Ramsay, Robert Strange, John and Alexander Runciman, Sir William Allan, Sir Henry Raeburn, and Sir John Watson Gordon. In figure painting she could boast of W. H. Lizars, Sir David Wilkie, and David Roberts, but no great artistic thinker had as yet devoted himself to the contemplation of Scottish scenery. Jacob More, Alexander Runciman, Cowper, and the elder Nasmyth, although possessed of no mean talents, were decided mannerists after the Italian, Dutch, or English schools of landscape, drawing their inspiration from the works of others, not directly from Nature. More and Runciman invested their subjects with an attempt at classical elegance. Far too

frequently their work was a mere medley of landscape, classic ruins, and stage figures, in ridiculous and perplexing combination. Following slavishly in the footprints of the old masters, they looked at Scottish scenery only through their eyes. Cowper and Nasmyth, catching and blending the spirit of the old English and the modern Dutch schools, studied minute and high finish; and in imparting mere sensuous beauty to their details, lost the truthful delineation of the broader aspects of Scottish scenery. As has been said, 'they did not hold the mirror faithfully up to Nature, for her laws are but feebly indicated in their works. Their pictures appear indeed to have been painted more to please the eye and fancy than to instruct the reason or to enlighten or elevate the imagination.' What was the result? Among the general public there was really no interest manifested in landscape whatever. It could not be said to be dead, for it had never been in existence. Nature was simply ignored, or at all events was not recognised as a source whence intellectual pleasure might be derived. The art of perceiving the true beauty of landscape was dormant, for no artist had as yet presented it in any other than a conventional or artificial manner. Even so late as 1824 public taste was barely awakened to the subject. It was in that year that Dr. John Macculloch, in a series of letters addressed to Sir Walter Scott, and published in four volumes, on the 'Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland,' attempted to attract public attention to the beauties of Nature as they are to be found in Scotland. Referring to the neglect that had so long prevailed, he says: 'We have ourselves almost witnessed the rise of a very slender degree of taste on the subject. The varied and beautiful scenery of Scotland had not been dreamt of a century ago. That of England was equally unknown, though accessible to a larger population and

to one in which the number of the educated was arithmetically if not proportionably greater; and though the arts were there more diffused, from the presence of collections of pictures, the possession of ancient buildings, a longer existence of ornamented villas, and rural scenery, etc., so little was the scenery of its lakes known, that even the lakes themselves were scarcely noticed in the popular work on geography which goes by the name of Guthrie. These beautiful spots are barely mentioned. . . . You and I,' addressing Sir Walter, 'can yet remember when all the knowledge of Scottish scenery was confined to Loch Lomond and the most accessible of the Perthshire lakes. At the time of Pennant's and Johnson's tours, now only fifty years past, scarcely any suspicion



PASS OF KILLIECRANKIE

of the beauty of our scenery was entertained; nor, excepting Staffa—too remarkable a spot to be easily passed without notice—was a single picturesque object named throughout the country. Johnson could not see them from physical defects, but Pennant talked of pictures, since he described those at Dublin and had an artist in his service; yet he has scarcely mentioned one spot of all that he saw as a man who felt the beauty of scenery. The account which Birt long before gives of the “hideous” Highland mountains and glens is absolutely ludicrous. I know not exactly when Edinburgh was first discovered to be the most romantic city in the world, but that

Caplan 2
Birt 1

KATRINE
 is a discovery of no high antiquity. I myself was one of the first, and I believe *the first absolute stranger*, who visited Loch Cateran. I had then a Scottish map in which it was not even inserted. You and the *Lady of the Lake* can tell another tale now.'

Yes; it required the vivid word-painting of Walter Scott to awaken, if not to create, a taste for the beauties of the field, the wood, the lake, and the mountain. Under his inspiration new ideas and conceptions were formed. Where the old tourists only saw confusion and deformity, disorder and chaos, 'black, ugly hills' and 'frightful moss-hags,' he threw the glamour of his witchery over the scene, and all was changed as if by magic.

It was Scott's colouring that led thousands of his countrymen to see Nature no longer as something to be shunned and avoided, but a source of delight to the eye and the intellect.

'Boon nature, scatter'd free and wild,
 Each plant or flower, the mountain's child,
 Here eglantine embalm'd the air,
 Hawthorn and hazel mingled there ;
 The primrose pale and violet flower,
 Found in each cliff a narrow bower ;

Highest of all, where white peaks glanced,
 Where glist'ning streamers waved and danced,
 The wanderer's eye could barely view,
 The summer heaven's delicious blue ;
 So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
 The scenery of a fairy dream.'

What Scott with his pen did to rouse public taste to a sense of the beautiful, Thomson with his brush was at the same time assiduously realising on canvas. Working contemporaneously, on



Alnwick Castle
from the Collection of the Duke of Devonshire and Burlington

different lines, with different materials, they were almost unconsciously working towards the same object.

Nor was it the desire for fame merely that actuated either the one or the other. All such efforts of genius are involuntary.

The development of Thomson's genius evolved and portrayed intuitively the peculiar characteristics of Scottish landscape, clothing with thought and feeling every object he delineated. The effort was spontaneous, and as irrepressible as Vesuvius. He did not paint for fame, but because he could not refrain from painting. Fame was what he least thought of—indeed, rather shrank from, as bringing his hobby into competition with his clerical profession.

The applause of the great and those we love, of those above and those around us, no sane man will ever despise. To the applause of the ignorant most great men are indifferent; such fame they regard as the idle clatter of idle tongues. True fame is often found where it is not sought, and sought where it is often not to be found. Thomson was not a man inclined to be indifferent to the good opinion of those he loved, but his best efforts were the outcome rather of persevering patient study, and an honest desire to master the secrets of Nature, than of any attempt to rouse the wonder and admiration of friends. He put his soul into his work, and as a modern writer has remarked, 'there is no other fine art than this—the passing of a man's soul into the work of his own hands.'

This was undoubtedly the secret of his wonderful success as an artist; and the pleasure which the pursuit of Art afforded him confirms the truth of the couplet—

'Spontaneous joys, where Nature has its play,
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway.'

When Thomson came to Duddingston in 1805 there was then no

public representative body to encourage Art; no public gallery of pictures, and few pictures of any kind to be seen in the houses of the generality of Edinburgh citizens. It seemed as if that part of the Second Commandment was as religiously observed in Scotland as in the land of Israel, forbidding the making of a likeness 'of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath.'

In the houses of the wealthy, family portraits might be found, the work of Lely, Vandyck, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Jamesone, Runciman, Nasmyth, or Raeburn, with classical landscapes from Italy, or rural scenes from Holland, but scarcely ever the outward and visible characteristics of the Scottish landscape. The few Scottish painters of the time with any taste for landscape found the demand for their works so small, that they chiefly relied upon portraiture as a means of existence. This was the case with Alexander Nasmyth and many others, who might have made a good figure in landscape had popular taste given them encouragement. It was, indeed, so far as Art was concerned, 'the day of small things.'

Gradually, however, public interest was awakened, and Scottish artists, with a growing sense of what was expected of them, and realising that by combination they might still further excite public attention to their craft, resolved upon an exhibition of their work. The first public exhibition of pictures in Edinburgh was held in Corri's Rooms, sometimes called the 'Lyceum,' Nicolson Street, in 1808.

In the following year the Association of Artists held their second exhibition in the art gallery of Henry Raeburn, which that artist had just erected for himself in what is now No. 32 York Place. At this exhibition 205 pictures were shown, but Thomson sent only one specimen from his easel, viz. a 'Landscape Composition.' And from the catalogues it would appear that he contributed

nothing to the exhibitions held in the three following years. His interest in the movement revived again in 1813, for we find that in that year he sent two pictures—a 'View near Tynninghame,' and the 'Glen of the Calder Burn, Lanarkshire.' In 1814 he exhibited three, and in 1815 no less than six, including 'Derwent Water,' 'View of Duddingston House'—a large work—'View of Duddingston Loch,' and the 'Lower Fall of Dalkairney, Ayrshire.'

The number of works thus exhibited in Edinburgh yearly was about two hundred, but so apathetic were the public, and so disheartened were the painters, that the exhibitions could only with difficulty be kept up. In 1815 the number of exhibits had fallen to 176, and in the following year it was even worse, for they only numbered 150. So far native Art could not boast of great success, and the artists, doubtless disheartened and disgusted with the general indifference of the public, relinquished the annual exhibition altogether, and the society, which numbered only fifteen members, including Mr. Thomson, came to an end.

Notwithstanding the non-success of these exhibitions, Thomson's work as a landscape painter was receiving a considerable amount of attention from those in the upper walks of life, for at this time he was so inundated with orders for pictures that it is said he had difficulty in meeting the demand.

Thus far the Edinburgh exhibitions had doubtless attracted public notice to his work.

After an interval of several years, public interest in Scotland was revived by the establishment in February 1819 of the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts. This fresh effort was not confined to artists; rather it was the enlightened impulse of the rank and talent of Scotland to remove what they

considered a national reproach, and to elevate the public taste of the community. It was largely supported by the nobility and landed gentry, many of whom had excellent collections of works of art, of priceless value, the accumulations of several generations. The object of these gentlemen was a most praiseworthy one, viz. that these treasures, which were in a measure inaccessible to the



LOCHLEVEN, GLENCOE

general public, should from time to time be brought together for public exhibition in the Capital.

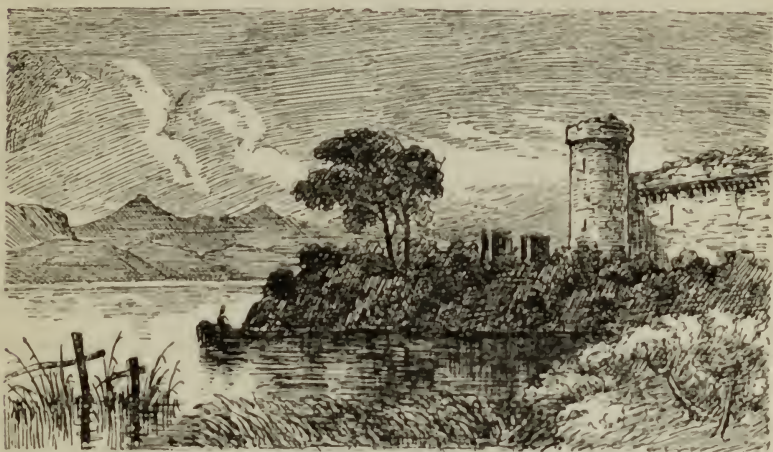
The original membership was fifty, and in the list of twenty-seven directors we have the name of one Duke—the Duke of Argyle; two Mar-

quises—Tweeddale and Queensberry; the Earls of Haddington, Elgin, Wemyss, Hopetoun, and Fife; a number of Baronets, including Sir William Forbes, Sir John Hay, Sir George Clerk; and of those who no doubt formed the working portion of the board, John Clerk of Eldin, Alexander Oswald of Auchencruive, Alexander Gordon, Adam Fairholm, and Professor Alexander Russell, who acted as secretary.

The first exhibition of the Institution took place in the gallery of Henry Raeburn in York Place, and the small but very fine collection was opened to view on 11th March 1819. It was entirely composed of the works of the old masters, both foreign and British;

and in the catalogue are found the names of Rubens, Tintoretto, Poussin, Vandevelde, Vernet, Cuyp, Wouvermans, Hobbema, Ostade, Caravaggio, Titian, Velasquez, Vandyck, Guido Reni, etc. etc. Lord Cockburn says of it that 'it was the best exhibition of ancient pictures that had ever been brought together in this country, all supplied from the private collections of its members and friends.'

Encouraged by the success of this effort, a second exhibition



CAERLAVEROCK CASTLE

was held in the spring of 1820, which also attracted much public attention. The Institution, now seen to be supplying a long-felt want, received a large accession to its membership, and in 1821 we find it had increased to 130, among the list occurring the name of Sir Walter Scott; while the Rev. John Thomson was elected an Honorary Member along with Sir David Wilkie, Patrick Nasmyth, and several other artists.

The exhibition this year was chiefly composed of modern pictures, but Thomson was not a contributor.

For a few years the works of the 'ancient masters,' and modern pictures, constituted alternately the exhibitions of the Institution, and there is no doubt that they contributed largely to the rapidly growing taste for Art which now manifested itself in Scotland.

These exhibitions were of a migratory character, for the Institution, having no building of its own, was indebted for accommodation to private parties, so that while for the most part they took place in Sir Henry Raeburn's gallery in York Place, one or two of them were held in 'Mr. Bruce's gallery, Waterloo Place,' Mr. Bruce being a picture-dealer of some repute.

The completion of the elegant Grecian building on the Mound in 1826, for the accommodation of the Royal Institution, gave it a new impulse, and its management now proposed not only to have periodical public exhibitions for the sale of the works of British artists, but to purchase such works for the Institution for permanent exhibition; while 'in order to excite emulation and industry among the younger artists, they resolved to offer premiums for competition to assist them to visit London or other places affording particular means of improvement.' It was also proposed to secure the means of affording relief to artists suffering from adverse circumstances, or 'to the families of any such, when deprived by death of the benefit of their talents and exertions.' All of which objects were most laudable, and were in some measure realised.

Portraiture formed a large and prominent feature of these early exhibitions, for if one may judge from a jocular remark of Sir Walter Scott, the modern landscapes shown were frequently of so



San Francisco Bay
from the Golden Gate

inferior a quality as to earn the epithet of the 'tea-board style of Art.' The new impulse of the Wilsons, 'Grecian' Williams, and above all Thomson, was a development which, while the conventional in Art was not altogether discarded, was inspired by a deeper insight into Nature's secrets, for 'in their works there was felt the breath of a new life.' But while Thomson shares with them the honour of having given this first impulse to Scottish



CAMBUSKENNETH ABBEY

landscape art, his personality lifted him high above them and his other contemporaries.

Thomson's contributions to these exhibitions were neither few nor insignificant, and were certainly not of the 'tea-board' style, as the following facts will show.

In 1822 he showed four paintings, among which appears his 'Aberlady Bay,' now in the National Gallery; 'Cambuskenneth,' now in the collection of the Right Hon. Lord Kingsburgh; and 'Dunbar Castle.'

In 1824 Thomson showed six works, all of superior excellence. These were 'Fast Castle,' and 'Part of Caerlaverock Castle' (also the property of Lord Kingsburgh), 'Coire-nan-Uriskin,' 'Prestonpans,' 'Fast Castle with the Bass Rock in the distance,' and 'A View from the Grounds of Hillside.'

In 1826 he exhibited five paintings, among which was the 'Dunluce Castle' which so roused the admiration of Sir Walter



INNERWICK CASTLE

Scott, a magnificent gallery picture, measuring about eight feet in length by about five in depth.

In the following year he appeared in great force, having no less than twelve pictures hung in the exhibition on the Mound. Among these are to be found 'Inchgarvie,' now the property of the Earl of Rosebery; 'Innerwick Castle,' the property of the Duke of Buccleuch; 'Kilchurn Castle,' 'Loch Katrine,' 'Tantallon Castle,' etc.

Again in 1828 he was a large contributor, this collection

having his picture of 'Turnberry Castle,' also referred to in the *Journal* of Sir Walter, which was purchased by the Royal Institution at the moderate price of fifty guineas, and now forms a part of the National Gallery collection.

During the eleven years of the active existence of the Royal Institution's exhibitions, Thomson loyally supported it, contributing close upon eighty pictures during that period; and when, in the fulness of time, the Royal Scottish Academy was in 1829 fairly launched into the world, and took its place in the direction and promotion of the Scottish School of Art, we find him equally helpful.

We have already referred to his influence over individual artists who have made the Scottish School famous, but his influence and power in the formation both of the Royal Institution and the Academy were no less important.

The permanent ascendancy of the Institution in the guidance of Scottish Art was not, perhaps, to be expected. It partook too much of the element of patronage to be long successful. What was wanted was a spirit of emulation, combined with brotherly help in a common cause, among the artists themselves. Lord Cockburn, who was a good deal mixed up with the controversies out of which the Academy had its birth, and was able to judge of its 'defects and vices,' tells us in his *Memorials of his Time*, that 'the Institution begun under great names had one defect and one vice. The defect was that it was calculated to do little or nothing for Art, except by such exhibitions, which could not possibly be kept up long, for the supply of pictures was soon exhausted. A rooted jealousy of our living artists as a body (not individually) by a few persons who led the Institution was its vice. These

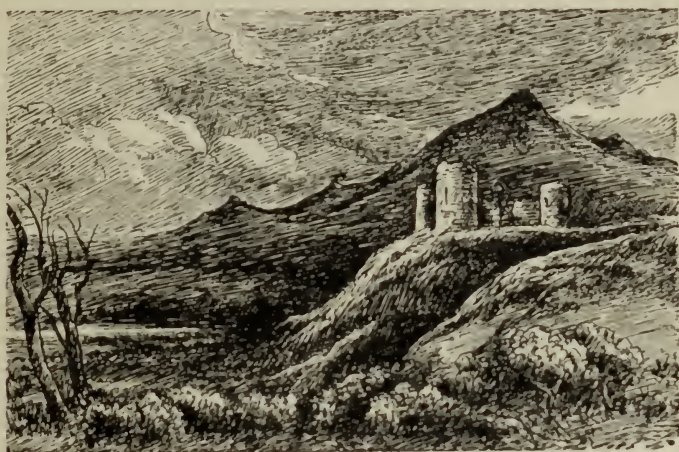
persons were fond of Art, no doubt, but fonder of power, and tried indirectly to crush all living Art and its professors, who ventured to flourish except under their sunshine. The result was that in a few years they had not a living artist connected with them. Their tyranny produced the Academy, and then having disgusted the only persons on whose living merit they could depend, the Institution itself sank into obscurity and uselessness.'

Knowing the parties concerned, and all the circumstances of the case as he did, there is doubtless much truth in Lord Cockburn's opinion, even though it be saturated with more of the 'special pleader' than the impartial judge. It lets us in behind the scenes, however, and that is everything in historical study.

The Academy was thus, it appears, an outcome of the Royal Institution, or rather a secession from it, in which the artists sought freedom to manage their own affairs. Being denied a share of the management of the exhibitions, a number of the associates, disgusted with the treatment to which they were subjected, formed themselves in 1826 into an association which they called the Scottish Academy. It had its first exhibition in No. 24 Waterloo Place in 1827, and for two or three years thereafter, in spite of a formidable combination arrayed against it, the exhibitions increased in popularity. The membership consisted of thirteen academicians, nine associates, and two associate engravers, but after a time the associates of the Royal Institution made overtures for admission to its privileges.

'When the Academy was first formed,' says Lord Cockburn, 'it consisted merely of the artists who were particularly displeased with the Institution; the majority, and the best of their brethren, still adhering to that body. After about two more

years' experience of the management of the Institution, it was found by the adherents—or associates—that there could be no cordial union between them and it, and not even a comfortable endurance of each other. Each as usual blamed the other, and I, who knew the whole facts, think that though there was unreasonableness on both sides, the artists had the least of it. It was plain, however, that they must part.' But they were in an



MORTON CASTLE

awkward position. On the one hand wincing under the consciousness of their subordinate position in connection with the Institution, while they had cut themselves off from the Academy, which was succeeding without their aid and against their will. In these circumstances they made an abortive attempt to found another Scottish Academy rather than join that already formed. Ultimately, however, having in 1829 broken with the Institution, whose intolerable management they could no longer endure, and smarting

under the failure of the attempt made to organise a constitution for themselves, they gave way to the expostulation of friends. Overtures were made through Henry Cockburn to the Academy for their admission as members in a body. This application somewhat embarrassed the Academy, then, as we have said, consisting of only fifteen members, coming as it did from twenty-four artists, who might thus virtually swamp the original founders.

At length in July 1829, through the intervention of Mr. Hope, the Solicitor-General for Scotland, and Cockburn, a union of the artists was effected, and the re-formed Academy, with a membership now of forty-two, started afresh on its career. This left the Institution without a single artist connected with it. Thomson, not being a professional artist, does not appear to have been mixed up in any way with the differences and contentions of this period. He would, no doubt, have his sympathies with the artists, but to the last he supported the Institution in their exhibitions. These were continued till 1830, after which the secession of the artists rendered their continuance impossible. He certainly was not idle. His exhibits during the years 1827, 1828, 1829, and 1830, in the Institution's exhibitions, amounted to no less than thirty-four, while he only showed one picture in the exhibitions of the Academy for these same years. When the Institution at length gave up the unequal competition and the Academy held the field, Thomson as loyally supported it, and from 1831 till 1840 contributed several pictures annually to its exhibitions. Some of those painted during this period are among his largest and most important works.

CHAPTER IX

Thomson an Honorary Member of the Academy—His Style of Art—*The Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*—Turner and Thomson compared—Their Genius—Thomson and the Old Masters—A Student of Nature—Lord Eldin's Advice—Thomson's Methods and Practice—Death of Mrs. Thomson—Sale of Thomson's Works, 1846—Public Opinion—*The Scotsman* and *Blackwood's Magazine*—Thomson a Pioneer, a Thinker, and Delineator.



IN the early exhibitions of the Scottish Academy Thomson's efforts in landscape held the foremost place, and his claims to recognition as a master were so palpable that, notwithstanding his being a member of another profession, these could not possibly be overlooked, and he was accordingly elected in 1830 an Honorary Member.

Many brilliant painters have followed him since that time, but it will be frankly admitted that John Thomson of Duddingston holds his own as one of the greatest in the Scottish School. His Art is in many respects thoroughly original, and is distinguished by a masterly, dignified style of composition which has seldom been surpassed. It is a style founded in the first instance upon the practice of the Dutch masters, afterwards drawing its influence from Poussin, Claude, and the Italian School, but ultimately the outcome of a close observation of Nature.

At their best, his works show skilful selection of subject, powerful, accurate drawing of details, and a happy combination

in their composition and arrangement of those qualities which give to the spectator the sense of dignity, grandeur, repose, and harmony. These with the qualities of abstract colour and tone, at once rich and deep, tempered by an all-pervading sense of chiaroscuro, give to his portrayal of the scenery of Scotland



FAST CASTLE

a charm and a glory that have not often been equalled by any other native artist.

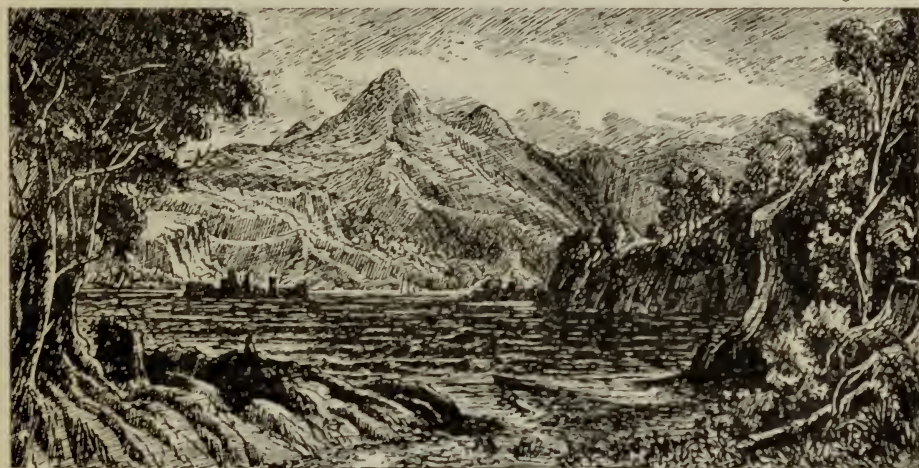
Whether it be a quiet, pastoral scene, such as may be found in his pictures of the Lothians round his own much-loved Dudding-

ston Loch, or the wild, rocky scenery of Tantallon, Fast Castle, Loch Scavaig, or Dunluce, there is the same masterful repose and harmony. The parts balance one another in stately regularity, and the colours blend in pleasing dissimilarity.

As compositions, Thomson's contributions to the *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, eleven in all, compare favourably in these respects with those of Turner—also eleven in number—in the same work. Of the two we prefer the former. They want the turmoil and bustle, the almost wild disorder so characteristic of Turner, and often quite misplaced; but for dignity of style, truthfulness of delineation,

and pleasing balance of parts, they are in no way surpassed by that great master.

That the genius of the two men differed in some respects is no derogation to either. 'One star differeth from another star in glory'; and though a non-discriminating crowd sometimes mistake an oil-lamp on a railway signal for one of the heavenly bodies, the genius of these two representatives of English and Scottish land-



EILANDONAN CASTLE, ROSS

scape in the first half of last century still shines clear and unmistakable. They were both artistic geniuses of a high order. Men have been challenged to define genius, and they have tried to do it without being asked. Each individual of the great human family is presumed to be endowed by Nature with special tastes, inclinations, or dispositions. The bent of their genius may lie in qualities of the mind developing themselves in certain kinds of action or employment; and if special success attends their efforts we count them

fortunate and great. But there are many who are clever and many who are successful in life whom we never think of associating with this faculty. If, on the other hand, genius consists in distinguished mental superiority, implying high and peculiar gifts of Nature, impelling the mind intuitively to certain favourite kinds of mental effort, and producing new combinations of ideas, imagery, and form, we at once restrict to comparatively few this Heaven-sent power. As one writer has put it—‘Real genius of the perfect kind would be more than one man could carry.’ Such genius as a man can possess is fragmentary, never whole. He may have literary genius, and that is enough for one; he may have artistic genius, that makes his work the admiration of many generations; he may have a genius for massing great bodies of men and bending their actions to his will; or his capacity for evolving from subtle problems the true philosophy of life may entitle a man to the high character of a Newton, a Napier, or a Euclid. Difficulty is the spur to genius, and frequently develops out of mere cleverness some latent Heaven-born power. The fact is, clever people can do nothing unless it is a little difficult; they cannot see what lies directly under their noses, and one of the truths so situated is, that perfect genius has never existed. But if we cannot get perfection, a man may still be true up to the limit of his capacity. Very often what is wanting in great men is the balance-wheel of common sense, and the want of it frequently nullifies much admirable effort. But the true genius is ever plodding, persevering, never satisfied that perfection has been attained. In such method and spirit John Thomson studied Nature; and as Nature’s interpreter his success was undoubted.

There are few painters whose landscapes have so much of reality, so much even of a local impress about them, and which are at the



View from the Cliff at the Point of View of the Lighthouse

same time so uniformly the fruit of abstraction and combination—works of Art in the strictest sense of the word. Thomson studied Nature to master its elementary effects, and combined his abstractions into groups of his own. He would spend hours, we are told, ‘striving to make an exact portrait of a graceful or majestic tree or rock—to catch the exact effect of some twilight gleam, or of sparkling water trickling below foliage in a stray sunbeam. But when he set himself to paint a picture, his object was to reproduce and group beautiful images, not to make a map or a view of a precise locality. Hence his landscapes are at once intensely Scottish in their character, and yet scarcely one of them approaches to a facsimile of any known locality. He has left views of particular places; but they are all representations of the scenes under the influence of accidental atmospheric effects, and as the momentary mood of his own mind apprehended them.’

He never lost sight of Nature. His most powerful and successful efforts, indeed, are evolved from a profounder knowledge of natural scenery, combined with the effects of light and shade, than was possessed by any of his contemporaries in this country. He had a deep, rich sense of the beauties of colour and form, though, owing to his never having studied the human anatomy, he was less master of form than of colour. He possessed a wonderful power of imparting the appearance of motion to air and water, which may be seen well exemplified in such pictures in the National Gallery, Edinburgh, as ‘Ravensheugh Castle,’ ‘Aberlady Bay,’ and the ‘View on the Clyde,’ where the motion of the waves as they dash against the rocks is given with exquisite truthfulness.

This could only be acquired by close watchfulness and rapidity of execution; by being much in the open, and noting the changing

effects as they flitted before him. 'The best unofficial education for an artist is,' says William Bell Scott, 'daily sketching—keeping a pocket sketch-book. If he in this way records every characteristic action, every beautiful feature or form he observes, not only in the accidents of society, or active human life, but also in vegetation, or among the lower animals, he will be real and natural in expressing whatever he invents. Without the faculty of observation the ideal becomes simply unreal.'

Thomson was continually noting changing effects, and his sketch-books were full of suggestions for future application; in fact, he was singularly successful in his sketches, particularly in subjects demanding grandeur of treatment or breadth of effect. He studied, too, the works of the older masters—Salvator Rosa, Poussin, and Claude; but instead of submitting to the drudgery of the schoolmen, he studied them only to discover and note what they had actually done for landscape art. He examined their works critically, no doubt, with the sole view of fixing a true starting-point for himself. Speedily mastering their defects and peculiar excellences, he strove to avoid the former, and as eagerly struggled to acquire the latter. With all the disadvantage of enjoying only a month under Nasmyth, he was still, in a true sense, a student of Nature and Art all his days. To these masters may undoubtedly be attributed his knowledge of the laws of composition and effect; but he could not well imitate them, for the simple reason that he was devoted to the delineation of Scottish, not Italian scenery.

Occasionally he indulged himself in Italian subjects, introducing pillared temples, grottoes, waterfalls, etc., after the manner of Claude, Turner, and Andrew Wilson, with occasionally wonderful evening effects, but we cannot say they were always happy or natural. They

generally are strained and lack the impress of Nature's inspiration. His *forte* was to portray, not the gorgeous landscape of the clear clime of Italy, but the deserted castles of his native land. The striking towers and fortalices along the varied Scottish coast, famed as the ancient retreat of the champions of Scottish independence, and not unfrequently the refuge of titled lawlessness, were the special objects of his study. Whether it was the castle perched high on some bold cliff or headland, with stern black rocks and the angry sea-waves dashing themselves impotently into spray at their base, as at Dunstaffnage, Dunnottar, Tantallon, Turnberry, or Fast Castle; or some lone peel or tower by the margin of peaceful river or lonesome lake; or in a deep, umbrageous setting of green, as at Castle Campbell, Brahan Castle, Newark Tower, Carron, Brodick, or Craigmillar,—in either class of subjects he was

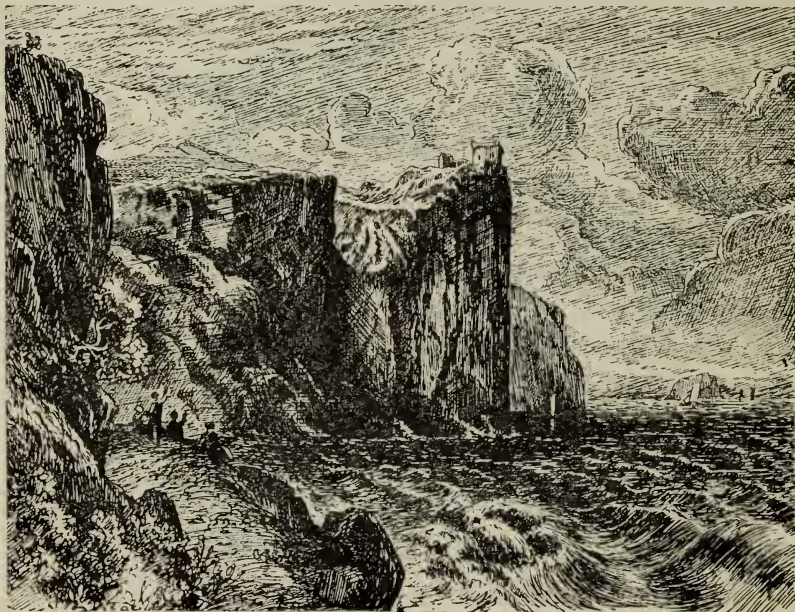


AT TIVOLI

equally at home. The pine was his favourite tree, which he utilised freely in compositions in which it was desirable to have a foreground fringe of foliage, and frequently they are so introduced, we must admit, when the particular locality could not even boast of such a feature. Consistency in this direction never troubled Thomson, for, as Lord Young once remarked when this characteristic was pointed out, he put in trees where it suited his purpose, just as he would put in sea-gulls! He originated and shaped out for

himself a style of his own, but a style that prominently expressed Scottish characteristics.

Caledonian skies, with all their wonderful gradation of colour, of light and shade, from the coolest of greys to the fiery glow of the setting sun, never failed to receive his closest observation. There was,



FAST CASTLE

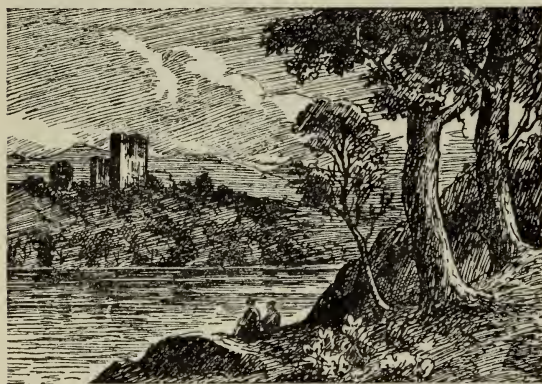
indeed, almost no atmospheric effect which our ever-varying climate presents which he had not noted. Early dawn or golden sunset, noontide brilliance or moonlight glamour, the cold, shivering sleet of the driving storm or the calm blue of the cloudless summer sky, all found in him an equally faithful delineator.

We have already referred to Thomson's admirable rendering of

water : whether it was the tiny stream murmuring and sobbing over its pebbly bed, the majestic river, the deep pool where the salmon lie, the ripple of the wavelets as they kiss the yellow sand of the seashore, or the heaving billows charging the relentless cliffs—in calm or in storm he was successful in all. No form or aspect that water assumed ever came amiss to him, for, in motion or at rest, he comprehended its most hidden characteristics and never failed to represent them. There is a wonderful dash—a wild heave in his seas—and, generally speaking, a grand purpose and design in his work, though occasionally marred by what may be called slovenly execution. There is nothing commonplace in his Art—even his worst—but everywhere thought and fancy, if not absolute imagination, rising at times to the highest artistic genius.

The studies for his pictures were generally made from Nature in chalk and pencil, sometimes thinly washed with colour; and not unfrequently, like other artists of his day, when ‘tallow dips’ were more in use than now, he made successful experiments in light and shade with candle snuff. Water-colour as a medium had not then attained to the brilliance, finish, and excellence of expression which now distinguishes this beautiful branch of Art. The early water-colour art was limited in its scope, being based upon the line and monochrome wash. Thomas Girtton, at the end of the eighteenth century, introduced the new method of tinting to full colour and obliterating the outline, and had he been spared he would have been a powerful rival to Turner in this particular medium; but, alas! he died in 1802 at the early age of twenty-seven. To get rid of outline altogether as an interruption of colour and as practically non-existent in Nature has been the

aim of our best painters who have excelled in water-colour as a medium. For one thing, the materials at the beginning of last century were not so well made, and their supposed want of permanency caused artists to be diffident as to their use. Turner



CARRON CASTLE

emancipated himself from this prejudice or delusion, and with marvellous success showed the art-world what extraordinary capabilities lay in water-colour. Thomson never attained to the same excellence in this medium, though some of his

water-colour drawings are marked with much carefulness of finish and power of effect.

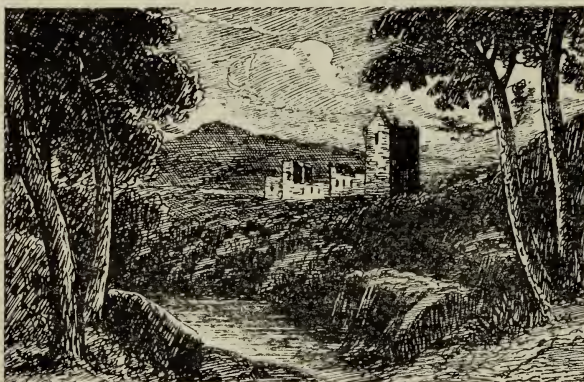
It was in oil that Thomson excelled. He considered it as the only permanent medium, and water-colour as merely a temporary material like pencil, chalk, or candle snuff. But alas for the permanency of oil! It is the very irony of fate that so many of the works of Thomson, and of nearly all the artists of his day who worked in oil, should have suffered sadly from the fault of the colourman, and have been in many cases thoroughly ruined, while their water-colours remain as fresh as when they first left their hand. This arose from the too free use of materials employed to give depth and brilliancy to the colour, whose properties were not sufficiently known or even suspected, but which time has proved to be

thoroughly pernicious. These were asphaltum and megilp, which were mixed and used together; the former being a mineral pitch or compact bitumen of a black or brown colour, with the tempting property of giving a high lustre to the darker parts of a picture; the latter, a gelatinous compound of linseed oil and mastic varnish. The tendency of this compound to shrink under the influence of heat is very great, and the sad condition in which some of the finest works of Art of last century are now to be found, where this material was used, is a warning to avoid the meretricious gloss which is of the earth earthy. Thomson is not the only one whose work has suffered thereby. We see the marks of it in the paintings of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Raeburn, Macculloch, Hill, Lauder, and Sir George Harvey, many of whose finest works have been irretrievably ruined.

Thomson's practice was to lay a foundation on his canvas of a substance composed of flour boiled with vinegar, which he called 'parritch,' upon which he then worked in his colours. If the 'parritch' were not sufficiently dried and hardened before the asphaltum and other colours were applied, the tendency was to contract and crack the painting more rapidly. Indeed, his reckless use of asphaltum, even for glazing purposes, gives some truth to Sir David Wilkie's sarcastic remark, 'Take from Thomson his asphaltum and his megilp, and nothing remains!' As a rule, the skies of his pictures have stood the test of time better than any other part. Occasionally we may find a blue that has slightly changed either to a dark opaque blue or greenish hue, but this does not often occur, and where it does is no doubt due to the fault of the particular pigment failing to retain its original purity. Generally speaking, his greys are excellent, being pure and trans-

parent, and nothing can exceed the charming delicacy of some of his clouds, with their pale, pearly shadows, so cool and yet so deep.

It is said that during the process of painting he was in the habit of repeating passages from the Greek, Latin, and English poets, that approximately described the subject in hand, or the particular aspect under which he proposed to represent it. The celebrated John Clerk, better known under the designation of Lord Eldin,



A BORDER TOWER

whose professional abilities as a judge, joined to his exquisite taste in the Fine Arts, made him a most congenial companion, would frequently spend hours in the minister's studio. Clerk, who was himself no mean

artist, used, it is said, to 'impress upon Thomson to be bold and resolute in painting, for the very effort at boldness of expression contributed to strengthen the conceptions of the mind.' Thomson never forgot the lesson, and he was in the frequent habit of quoting Clerk's language to others and repeating it to himself at his easel. He was never indeed above availing himself of a hint or observation if given by a friend in a friendly spirit, especially if he discovered in it a grain of sense or truth.

Thomson painted with great facility, and frequently with rapidity,

and would finish a pretty large canvas in all its essential features in a few hours, leaving perhaps only a few details such as figures in the foreground, or stray touches on buildings or foliage till after it was dry. So hurried indeed was he in his work, that we have been told by one who occasionally visited the manse, that just before the time for the annual exhibition several pictures might be seen out on the grass before the door to hasten the drying!

Work so done is, of course, open to the imputation of imperfection, though not necessarily of ineffectiveness. That a good deal of the deterioration that has befallen some of Thomson's work is to be attributed to these circumstances is undoubted. At the same time, we must guard against the idea that his pictures have all a tendency in this direction. This is not so. Many that we have seen are remarkable for their freshness, purity of tint, and absence of any signs of cracking.

Judging from two of the extant portraits of John Thomson, which both represent him at his easel, he appears to have been very particular as to his garb, for even when at work with his brush he always retained the orthodox clerical black coat, the only precaution taken against accidental spots of oil or paint being the upturned sleeves of his coat. He would never, however, it is said, either on Sunday or Saturday, wear a white scarf or necktie, always preferring a broad black scarf.

In his habits he was methodical and regular, working on steadily and perseveringly without any regard as to the disposing of his pictures, for, as we have already hinted, there was very little of the commercial spirit in Thomson's art. Once his friend Bruce, the picture-dealer, took him a quantity of ultramarine, a colour which then sold at a very high price—as much as £10 an ounce—which

he wanted him to buy. Thomson said he could not afford it as he had no money, but the difficulty was got over by Bruce offering to take some pictures in exchange. 'Ah!' said Thomson, 'I will be very glad to deal with you on these terms; help yourself, take as many as you think will pay for the paint.' On that occasion Bruce got several pictures away with him, any one of which would now far more than pay for three times the quantity of ultramarine for which they were then considered the equivalent. Even the visits of friends caused no perceptible interruption to his art work. On one occasion Professor Wilson (Christopher North) happened to be at the manse, and expressed a desire to possess one of the minister's pictures. Thomson had none at the time which he thought quite suitable, 'but,' said he, 'I won't be long in painting you one,' and there and then he commenced and all but finished a lovely view of Dunluce Castle, while the Professor was beside him. This picture is still in the possession of the Professor's family, by whom it is highly prized, and it has been reproduced as one of the illustrations to this volume, by kind permission of Mrs. Wilson, the Professor's daughter-in-law.

John Thomson is described by one who knew him well as tall, well built, not stout and yet not slender; he had an elegant carriage, which imparted to him an easy, gentlemanly demeanour, and a winning manner most attractive to strangers—in fact, a jolly, honest-looking, good-natured man; affable to the last degree; his beaming countenance, with its fine rosy complexion, was, when he spoke, generally suffused with a happy smile. One felt speedily at ease in his company, for beneath the pleasant exterior and those bright, twinkling eyes of his, there lay the kindly disposition, the sympathetic nature, the true honest heart, without

which all outward semblances are but shams; for, as Burns truly says,

‘The heart ay’s the part ay
That makes us right or wrang.’

Like a great many clergymen of the period—though it was by no means restricted to the ‘cloth’—Thomson was much addicted to the habit of snuffing. It was a custom even more common than smoking is nowadays, a snuff-box being an almost indispensable part of a gentleman’s furnishings. It was certainly a custom which would have been ‘more honoured in the breach than the observance,’ but the notion prevailed that snuff acted in some stimulating way upon the nerves of the brain, as whisky is supposed to revive exhausted physical activity, and indeed medical authorities were frequently at great pains to enunciate its importance and value in this connection. Dr. Gordon Hake humorously describes snuffing as a ‘waking up the torpor so prevalent between the nose and the brain, making the wings of an idea uncurl like those of a new-born butterfly!’ The late Earl of Stair, who when a lad was an occasional visitor at Duddingston Manse, delighted us once with a description and imitation of the minister’s *modus operandi* in the performance of this function. ‘He was,’ said his lordship, ‘a most voluble and artistic snuffer; covering the hand which between finger and thumb contained the pinch with his large red silk handkerchief, he would in resonant tones magnify the importance of the action, and conclude with a grand flourish of the silk.’

Thomson’s works are scattered far and wide. They are to be found in the country residences of our nobility, and not a few of the old families of Edinburgh and the neighbourhood have treasured specimens to show, while some have found their

way across the Border, and are to be met with here and there in England.

Particularly we would mention the fine collection possessed by the Earl of Stair¹ at Oxenfoord Castle, including several of his best works, such as 'Glen Feshie,' 'Tantallon Castle,' and 'Castle



CARRON CASTLE, ROSS

Urquhart,' than which it would be difficult to find better examples. Reproductions will be found among our illustrations.

The late Mr. Lockhart Thomson, nephew of the artist, had a large

¹ Thomson's relationship to the Stair family and to Professor Wilson linked them together in a very close family bond, which it is pleasant to know is still remembered by their descendants. Professor Wilson and North Dalrymple, ninth Earl of Stair, grandfather of the present respected Earl, were married to two sisters, respectively Jane and Margaret Penny, so that they were brothers-in-law by marriage; while Mr. Thomson's second wife was the widow of North Dalrymple's near kinsman, Martin Dalrymple of Fordell and Cleland, second son of Sir William Dalrymple, Bart., of Cousland.

and important collection of over thirty, which since his death has been dispersed. Among these were such pictures as 'The Martyrs' Tombs,' engraved by William Bell Scott; 'Carron Castle,' 'Brahan Castle,' 'The Pass of Killiecrankie,' 'Fast Castle,' and a 'Sea Piece with Battleships,' the last-named said to be the combined work of Thomson and J. M. W. Turner, while some of the smaller ones are gems of Art.

The Right Hon. Lord Kingsburgh, Lord-Justice Clerk, has a large and varied collection, consisting of not less than forty-two specimens, some of them, such as 'Fast Castle' (an engraved picture), 'Cambuskenneth Abbey,' 'Innerwick Castle,' 'Stirling Castle,' 'Crichton,' 'Conway,' and 'Roslin' Castles, being excellent examples. Several of these are reproduced in this volume.

The Right Hon. Lord Young, another ardent admirer of Thomson's work, is able to show some thirteen or fourteen pictures from his easel. There, for example, we find his grand painting of 'Dunure Castle' (etched by William B. Hole, R.S.A.), a large view of 'Duddingston House,' 'The Cuchullin Hills, Skye,' 'Tantallon Castle,' and an early but fine 'View in Cumberland,' after the manner of Nasmyth.

The Right Hon. the Earl of Rosebery is the owner of several local views at Dalmeny, notable for their careful finish rather than for breadth of effect. As views of park scenery they are very fine, the grouping and delineation of the trees being thoroughly artistic.

In the splendid gallery of Thomson's works at Bowhill, Selkirkshire, his Grace the Duke of Buccleuch is the happy possessor of perhaps as rich and varied a collection as it has been our privilege to examine. It includes such important works as 'Newark Castle,' 'Brodict Castle,' 'Ravensheugh Castle,' 'The Glen of Altnarie,' and

‘Edinburgh from Inverleith House.’ As an evidence of the high estimation in which the artist was held by the present Duke’s father and grandfather, it may be mentioned that there are no less than thirty specimens of his work now in possession of the family, many of which were purchased direct from the artist.

After Mr. Thomson’s death his widow removed to Edinburgh, taking with her a large and interesting collection of his works in oil,



INCHGARVIE

water-colour, charcoal, and crayons, some of them unfinished. On her death, which occurred on 11th October 1845, such of these as had not been previously disposed of were sold by public auction. By the public press of the time the event was the subject of several appreciative notices, of which the following from the columns of the *Scotsman* is a specimen. It helps us to judge of the estimation in which Thomson’s work was held in Edinburgh at that date:—

‘The fine collection of this great artist’s works, hitherto preserved by his family, is now about to be broken up and dispersed by public auction in



St. Andrew's Castle
Dunrobin Castle

the saleroom of Messrs. Tait and Nisbet. No man has done so much as Mr. Thomson to maintain the character of native Art in landscape, and no man has more successfully transferred to the canvas the grand and impressive features of his country's scenery. His pictures have also done much to educate the eye and inform the judgment of his countrymen—to teach them that it is not a slavish imitation of details which forms the great merit of a painter, but the vigorous grasp which seizes the prominent and commanding features of Nature, and without dissipating strength in their elaboration fixes them at once upon the canvas. No one with any sympathy either for Nature or Art can walk round the saloon where these pictures are exhibited without acknowledging the high genius that inspires this great artist's works. The rudest sketch bespeaks freedom and power. Nature is not extinguished beneath the heavy facts of mere detail; her great lineaments are here as they address the eye and stir the fancy of the poet; and while we have the boundless forest stretched before us, we can well spare the tedious art that invites us to count its thousand leaves. To these and all such works may well be applied the observation that they present us with Nature in the spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the spirit maketh alive. We feel,' says the writer very sensibly in conclusion, 'that we confer a benefit on the lovers of Art by directing their attention to these great works, and even although they may not be disposed to enrich their collections by purchasing from this source, let them embrace the opportunity of at least viewing them before their final dispersion.'—*Scotsman*, 11th April 1846. .

If it be true that John Thomson's reputation in the place that once knew him so well is now perhaps somewhat obscured by the galaxy of artistic genius which has since then given the Scottish School of Painters a world-wide celebrity, do not let us forget that to him his contemporaries, at all events, gave a deservedly first place.

Repeatedly do we find his works the subject of laudation in the periodical literature of the day. In the pages of *Blackwood's*

Edinburgh Magazine, which spared no one, but attacked everything and everybody with masterly vigour and freshness, he is by his good friend Professor Wilson invariably held up to admiration as 'the first artist of his country.'

Here is how he appears to them in Christopher North's *Noctes Ambrosianae*. Referring to the Exhibition of 1824, whose merits are being discussed by Ambrose, Tickler, Shepherd, and North, the Shepherd breaks out with—

'Oh, the pictures! I was there the day. Oh man, yon things o' Wulkie's are chief endeavours. That ane frae the Gentle Shepherd is just Nature hersel'.

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Tickler.—'Mr. Thomson of Duddingston is the best landscape painter Scotland ever produced; better than either Nasmyth or Andrew Wilson or *Greek Williams*. Some noble landscapes of his are the chief embellishments of the Exhibition.'—*Blackwood*, vol. xv.

Again, in 1827, North declares:—

'Mr. Thomson of Duddingston is the best landscape painter in Scotland. THE MAN'S A POET.'

Shepherd.—'I dinna like that picture o' his at a' o' Loch Catrine frae the Gobbins' Cave. The foreground is too broken, spotty, confused and huddled—and what is worst of all, it wants character. The chasm down yonner, too, is no half profound enough, and inspires neither awe nor wonder. The lake itself is lost in its insignificance, and the distant mountains are fairly beaten by the foreground, and hardly able to haud up their heads.'

North.—'There is truth in much of what you say, James, but still, the picture is a magnificent one.'

Shepherd.—'I wadna gie the "Bass Rock" for a dizzen o't [another picture in the same Exhibition]. You may weel ca' it a magnificent ane—and I wud wish, in sic weather, to be ane o' the mony thousand sea-birds

that keep wheeling unwearied on the wind, and ever and anon cast anchor on the cliffs—still solitary and sublime—a sea-piece, indeed, worthy of being hung up in the Temple o' Neptune.'

North.—'Kinbane Castle [also an exhibit of 1827] is just as good, and



LOCH KATRINE

Torthorwald Castle, Dumfriesshire, is the best illustration I ever saw of Gray's two fine lines—

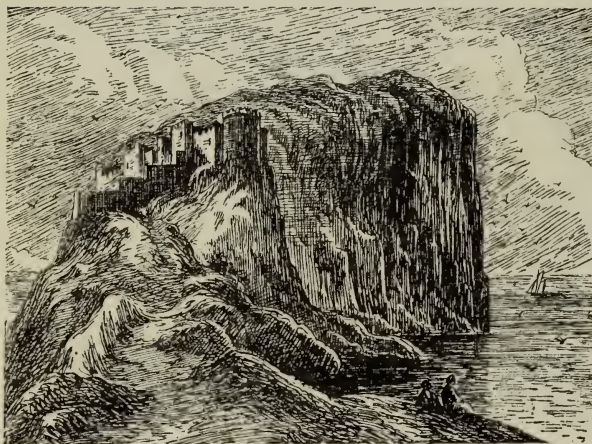
"Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds."

Shepherd.—'Mr. Thomson gi'es me the notion o' a man that had loved Nature afore he had studied Art—loved her and kent her weel, and been let into her secrets, when nane were by but their twa sells, where the wimplin' burn plays in open spots in the woods, where ye see naething but stems o' trees, an' a flicker o' broken light interspersing itself among the shadowy branches—or without ony concealment in the middle o' some

wide black moss—like the moor o' Rannoch—as still as the shipless sea, when the winds are weary, and at nightfall in the weather gleams o' the setting sun a dim object like a ghost standing alane by its solitary sel'—aiblins an auld tower, aiblins a rock, aiblins a tree-stump, aiblins a cloud, aiblins a vapour, a dream, a naething.'

North.—'Yes, he worships Nature, and does not paint with the fear of the public before his eyes. It is a miserable mistake to paint purposely

for an exhibition. He and his friend Hugh Williams are the glory of the Scottish Landscape School.'



THE BASS ROCK

Again, in 1830 (April), we have the friends discouraging together in Ambrose's back parlour upon the Exhibition of that year.

Shepherd.—'Hae ye been at the exhibition o' pictures by leevein artists at the Scottish Academy, Mr. North, an' what think ye o't?'

North.—'I look in occasionally, James, of a morning, before the bustle begins, for a crowd is not for a crutch.'

Shepherd.—'But, ma faith, a crutch is for a crood, as is weel kent o' yours, by a' the blockheads in Britain. Is't guid the year?'

North.—'Good, bad, and indifferent, like all other mortal exhibitions. In landscape we sorely miss Mr. Thomson of Duddingston.'

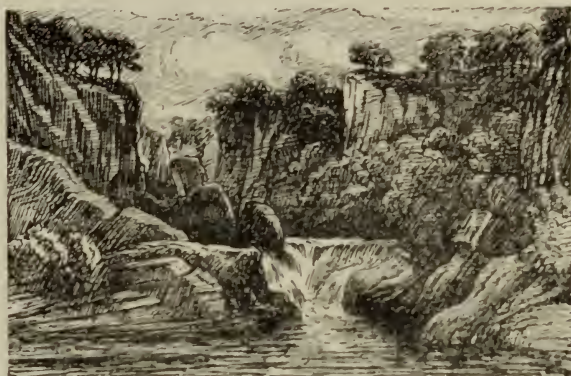
Shepherd.—'What can be the matter wi' the minister? He is no' deid?'

North.—'God forbid! But Williams is gone: dear delightful Williams,

with his aerial distances into which the imagination sailed as on wings, like a dove gliding through sunshine into gentle gloom, with his shady foregrounds, where love and leisure reposed—and his middle regions with towering cities, grove-embowered, solemn with the spirit of the olden time—and all, all embalmed in the beauty of those deep Greeian skies! Mr. Thomson of Duddingston is now our greatest landscape painter. In what sullen skies he sometimes shrouds the solitary moors!’

Shepherd.—‘And wi’ what blinks o’ beauty he aften brings out frae beneath the clouds the spire o’ some pastoral parish kirk, till ye *feel* it is the Sabbath!’

North.—‘Time and decay crumbling his castles seem to be warning against the very living rock,—and we feel their endurance in their desolation.’



PULPIT ON THE FINDHORN

Shepherd.—‘I never look at his roarin’ rivers, wi’ their preeipices, without thinking somehow or ither o’ Sir William Wallace. They seem to belong to an unconquerable country!’

North.—‘Yes, James, he is a patriotic painter. Moor, mountain, and glen—castle, hall, and hut—all breathe sternly or sweetly o’ auld Scotland. So do his seas and firths roll, roar, blacken and whiten with Caledonia from the Mull o’ Galloway to Cape Wrath. Or when summer stillness is upon them, are not all the soft, shadowy pastoral hills Scottish that in their still, deep transparency invert their summits in the transfiguring magic of the far sleeping main?’

Numerous extracts of a similar kind might be quoted from the

same gifted pen, all going to show the high estimation in which Thomson's work was then held.

Let another suffice, taken from an article by a different writer in *Blackwood*, vol. xl. p. 76, on 'The British School of Painting.' In this paper the writer, after a review of the works of Turner, goes on to refer to Copley Fielding in London and John Thomson at Edinburgh as typical men. 'No one,' he says, 'will be so bold as to deny to Fielding the merit of consummate delicacy in the management of his pencil—a Claude-like richness in foliage and the happiest delineation of the varying effects of coast scenery; or to Thomson a depth of shade, vigour of conception, and strength of colouring which place him among the most accomplished artists of the present day. But will either the one or the other stand the ordeal with Poussin, Ruysdael, Claude Lorraine, or Salvator Rosa? That is the question; and these truly eminent men will see at once in what rank we estimate their genius, when we place them in line with such compeers. And why should they not equal—nay, excel them? Why should not the wild magnificence of the Scottish lakes, or the rich furnishing of the Cumberland valleys, or the savage grandeur of the coast scenery of Devonshire, inspire our painters as they have done our poets, and produce a Scott, a Wilson, or a Southey in the sister art?'

In more recent times, and by writers of merit on the subject of Art, there have been occasional references to Thomson's genius in such outstanding periodicals as the *Art Journal* and the *Portfolio*. By them his work is recognised as of the highest excellence and of undoubted value, because it told with effect on the Art culture of his day to an extent perhaps which the work of few modern artists can approach. It had its defects, no doubt resulting



Albert Küster, 1840

Blick auf Schloss von Burg, bei Paderborn

from occasional overhaste and the use of pernicious material, but these were the accidents of circumstances over which he had little control. 'When newly painted,' says one writer, 'his pictures were exceedingly rich and beautiful in colour, and some still remain so. There is a grand purpose and design in his work, though marred by what would nowadays be called slovenly execution.'

Another writer—Walter Armstrong—speaking of Thomson as an artist says: 'In his painting he gave evidence of a truer gift for landscape than any other Scotsman of his time. His fame'—referring more particularly to his appreciation south of the Tweed—'has suffered here through the presence in the [London] National Gallery of an atrocious example of his



LOCH LOMOND

work. Like all amateurs he was very uncertain: now he would paint a landscape worthy almost of Richard Wilson, and this he would follow up with a performance feeble enough for a school-girl. His model seems to have been Gaspar Poussin tempered by Claude and Wilson. As a colourist he was conventional, but he often achieved a silvery harmony which is very agreeable. Unlike

most amateurs he succeeded best when he tried least. Some of his more sketchy pictures, in which the colour is put on freely, with a dexterity and sympathy almost equal to Morland's, hint at a mastery which is found in none of his more ambitious 'pictures,' and, as an instance of this, the writer refers to a small picture in the possession of the Earl of Wemyss, exhibited by his Lordship in London in 1886, and now in the collection at Gosford House.

We have said sufficient, we think, to justify our contention that Thomson must be recognised as occupying the front rank among British masters of landscape Art, and being undoubtedly one of the best which his country has produced. You may call him the Scottish Claude or the Scottish Turner, or by any other borrowed name you will, but he has individuality enough to stand on his own merits, or to be criticised for his faults. These we have attempted honestly to discover and point out. For him, as one has well said, 'Art was a passion. The deep, tremulous emotions, ever ready when not held down by a strong will to break forth in a cry, or break down in a flood of tears, were the dowry of a truly poetic, essentially artistic nature. As he looked out upon earth and sea and sky, all seemed to stir with the gleam of God's eye. Beauty was to him God's handwriting—a wayside sacrament to be welcomed in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower; to be drunk in with all one's eyes.'

The influence of such a man as Thomson cannot well die. His name may be forgotten and his works in time may perish, but the ever-flowing, ever-swelling stream of the nation's culture must for ever be enriched by the impetus his genius imparted to the Art ideas of his day and generation. His teaching and example become in a measure imperishable, for they have made their impress deeply

on the Art life of the people. Even as Scott and Burns have influenced our literature, so Thomson has been a moulder of the Scottish School of Art. Such works as he has left us are a priceless legacy which must not be lightly valued. Like great deeds, which cannot die—

‘They with the sun and moon renew their light,
For ever blessing those that look on them.’

APPENDIX

PEDIGREE OF REV. JOHN THOMSON OF DUDDINGSTON

JOHN THOMSON'S progenitors resided at Weddersbie, and appear as proprietors of the lands of Newton of Collessie, in Fife. James Thomson, of Newton of Collessie, on the 27th June 1618, being then on the point of death, constituted Bessie Stirk, his lawful spouse, tutrix to their children William, James, Robert, George, John, and three daughters, and 'commends his saull to the protection of Almighty God, and the revenge of his innocent blood, committit be malicious persons, in the handes of God and his dear and loving friends.' He died on the following day (*Confirmed Testaments*, St. Andrews). James Thomson, his great-grandson, after the Revolution, became minister of Colinton, near Edinburgh, and was translated to Elgin, 21st June 1696. His wife, Elizabeth Paterson, a daughter of Thomas Paterson, minister of Borthwick, and widow of George Turnbull of Currie, died in 1698; but he again married, as on the 12th February 1718 he had a Charter of Confirmation to himself (as son of the late William Thomson of Newton of Collessie), to Janet Brodie, his spouse, in conjunct fee, of the said lands, formerly held of James, Earl of Southesk, as superior. He died at Elgin, 1st June 1726, and bequeathed 600 merks to buy Bibles for the poor of the parish (*Shaw's History of Moray*, p. 241). The eldest son, James Thomson, M.D., Elgin, sold the lands of Newton in 1760, and died unmarried. He was the translator of the *Commentaries of the Emperor Antoninus* (London, 1747, 8vo). The second son, Thomas Thomson, was admitted minister of Auchtermuchty, in 1701. He married, in 1715, Margaret, daughter of Hugh Craig, minister of Galashiels, by whom he had a numerous family, and died 1st January 1733 at the age of 56. His sixth son, of the same name, was for some time previous to 1753 tutor in the family of Sir James Ferguson of Kilkerran, by whom he was presented to the parish of Dailly. He became minister of Dailly in 1756, and was the father of a large family. He died, 19th February 1799, at the age of 70. By his first wife, Peggy Hope, daughter of the Hon. Sir Alexander Hope of Carse, he had one daughter, Margaret, who was married to her cousin, Rev. James Thomson, minister of Girvan, afterwards of Prestonkirk. By his second wife, Mary Hay of Lochside, widow of Mr. Lockhart, he had four sons and four daughters, of whom Thomas

Thomson was the eldest, and John Thomson the fourth son, the other sons being Francis and Adam. These were born as follows:—Thomas Thomson, 10th November 1768; Francis, 10th February 1770; Adam, 28th October 1776; and John, 1st September 1778. The daughters were Christian, born 1771; Mary, 1773; Agnes, 1775; and Helen in 1780. The youngest of these, Miss Helen Thomson, became the wife of Professor James Pillans, of Edinburgh University, being married to him 9th August 1811. Mrs. Thomson, their mother, died at Edinburgh, 21st January 1822, aged 76.

PORTRAITS OF THE REV. JOHN THOMSON

There are several good portraits of the artist-minister extant, of which two are to be found in the SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY.

1. PORTRAIT BY ROBERT SCOTT LAUDER, R.S.A., his son-in-law, is a half-length front view, of small size, 25 inches by 20 inches. Thomson is here represented standing at a table fully robed in black Geneva gown and bands, with his left hand resting easily on a large open Bible, while his right is thrust into his side and is partly shaded by the folds of the gown. His easel is introduced in the background with a large framed canvas upon it, his palette being suspended on the wall above, indicative, we presume, of the day of rest.

The execution of the details is characterised by Lauder's carefulness of finish and tasteful colouring, the hands being specially worthy of notice for their delicacy and refinement of drawing.

The picture is the property of the Royal Scottish Academy, through whose courtesy it has been reproduced in photogravure, and forms the frontispiece to this volume.

2. PORTRAIT BY WILLIAM WALLACE, an artist who practised in Edinburgh as a portrait painter for ten or fifteen years, and about 1833 settled in Glasgow. He followed out the same line of Art there with some success, and died in 1866.

On a canvas 33 inches by 26 inches, upright, a full-length portrait of Thomson is given. He is represented seated at his easel, on which there is a large framed canvas, with a partly finished woody landscape. His left hand holds the painter's palette and malstick, while his elbow rests on the rail of the low circular-backed armchair. The right hand hangs easily by his side, while the right leg is crossed over the knee.

Thomson, in this picture, is dressed in the usual clerical garb of the period, black coat and trousers, with deep black scarf round the throat, over which his collar is barely visible. He appears to be about the age of fifty-two, so that it was probably painted in 1830. It represents him with a high, bald forehead, with a tinge of grey on the whiskers and side locks. There is a bright sparkle in his eye, and a smile plays round his lips.

The portrait was bequeathed to the National Gallery by Thomson's brother-in-law, Professor Pillans.

Two replicas of it by the same artist were in the possession of the late Mr. Lockhart Thomson, one of which has been exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh for some years on loan.

PORTRAIT BY SIR HENRY RAEBURN, R.A. 25 inches by 30 inches. This fine portrait of Thomson by his friend Sir Henry, now in the possession of Archibald Stirling, Esq. of Keir, Bridge of Allan, is a head and bust; representing him at the age of forty-five, while still in his manly vigour, and before his waving raven locks had become grey or had left his massive forehead. The eyes are keen and searching, the lips full and expressive, as if 'the deep, tremulous emotions were ready to break down in a flood of tears.' The broad collar of the coat and vest are thrown well back, exposing to view a spotless white cravat. The flesh tints are in Raeburn's best style, being clear, fresh, and healthy.

This picture has been engraved by Alexander Hay, but the plate hardly does justice to the original: impressions of it are scarce.

The portrait was long the property of the Raeburn family, and was lent by them to the Raeburn Exhibition in Edinburgh in 1876. It was afterwards acquired by the late William Stirling, Esq. of Keir.

PORTRAIT BY YELLOWLEES. 15½ inches by 12½ inches. In the possession of Ralph Dundas, Esq., Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh.

Thomson is represented in half-length sitting before an easel, upon which is a canvas with a mountain landscape. He appears as a comparatively young man—certainly not more than forty—the side view of his face exhibiting a slightly protruding under lip. He wears a pair of spectacles, and the brown dressing-gown is handsomely trimmed with fur on the collar and sleeves. The portrait, if not bearing a close resemblance to the others mentioned, is very pleasingly composed, and daintily painted.

It was exhibited in the Loan Exhibition of National Portraits in 1884.

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